

**The Dekadas of National Art:  
Nationality in Soviet Music, 1936–1960**

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## Abstract

The dekadas of national art (*dekadi natsional'nogo iskusstva*) were national arts festivals instituted under Stalin in 1936, intended to display the art of the Soviet republics in Moscow. They became an important symbol of High Stalinism, seeking to foster the transnational exchange between European art music and traditional folk music of the Soviet republics, predominantly through the genre of opera. After a hiatus during the war, the dekadas were reinstated in 1951 and eventually cancelled in 1960. Despite the enormous role the dekadas and music of the Soviet republics played in Soviet culture and musical life more broadly, no large-scale study has yet emerged about them in any language.

This study blends cultural and reception history (supported by substantial archival research carried out in Moscow) with musical commentary of dekada works. This is bound together into a broader examination of music and power and its relationship between centre and periphery. Chapters 1–5 cover the period 1936–1941, exploring how the dekadas emerged as a cultural symbol of high Stalinism in the pre-war era. Therein I pay special attention to the works of Russian composers who composed works for the Soviet republics: Yevgeny Brusilovsky, Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, Aram Khachaturian, Markian Frolov, and Sergey Balasanyan. Chapter 6 examines the post-war dekada revival, and its troubled existence in the post-Stalin era. Ultimately, this thesis considers how transnational musical exchange balanced the tension between the imperialist ambitions of the Soviet project with its self-confessed anticolonial policies, specifically under late Stalinism and its aftermath.

## Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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From my time in Russia, I wish to thank the State Institute of Arts Studies for supporting my research in Moscow. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Levon Hakobian, who showed kind interest in my research amid many hours of discussion. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the staff of the Moscow archives at which I spent many absorbing hours: RGALI, GARF, RGANI, and RGASPI. I also profited from the assistance of the staff of the Russian State Library, especially in the main reading rooms, the music department in Pashkov House, and the newspaper department in Khimki. I also wish to sincerely thank HDA SBU in Kyiv, for responding to my request for information and generously scanning hundreds of pages of materials and supplying them electronically. Many thanks are also due to Inessa Dvuzhilnaya for sharing many materials about Belorussian music with me, including unpublished archival materials.

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## Explanatory Note

I use the Cyrillic transliteration system employed in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001). With respect to Russian, the main distinctions from the otherwise ubiquitous Library of Congress system are as follows:

- the short vowels э, и, ы, and ъ are transcribed respectively as é, i, ĭ, and y;
- the iotized vowels я, ё, and ю become 'ya', 'yo', and 'yu';
- the Cyrillic е is rendered by its Roman cognate e, but 'ye' when starting a word or following a hard/soft sign or vowel.

In bibliographical contexts I apply strict transliteration of the source language. In the main text, however, I largely suppress hard/soft signs and contract the final -iy to -y in male names. I generally favour commonly accepted spellings of names, although since many names in this thesis traverse a mixture of languages and alphabets, there are often multiple standardized spellings to navigate. I have followed *New Grove* for names of composers and their works, but for figures outside the musical world I generally favour a transliteration of their name from Russian, since rendering each in their native language would be prohibitively complex.

For musical works in languages other than Russian, I reproduce the published Russian underlay from Soviet editions, and in such cases translations are similarly made from the Russian rather than reflecting the original language. For the sake of clarity, I refer to Soviet republics by their modern names rather than those officially ascribed at the time (thus Kyrgyzstan, rather than Kyrgyz SSR or Kirgizia). In any case, these were in relatively common parlance even in the 1930s.

Russian archival sources are identified conventionally by *fond* (collection), *opis* (inventory), *delo* (item) or *yedinitsa khraneniya* (file unit), and *list'i* (folio/s), though I do so in an abbreviated form. Thus, RGALI, f. 962, op. 21, yed. khr. 1, l. 2 appears as RGALI 962/21/1, 2. References to the Ukrainian archive HDA SPU are given by *fond* (collection), *sprava* (file), and *arkush* (folio), thus HDA SPU, f. 6, spr. 44240-fp, ark. 1 appears as HDA SPU 6/44240-fp, 1. Verso pages are indicated by a superscript 'v', rather than with the Russian abbreviation ob. (*oborot*). All archival abbreviations are given in the Bibliography.

## Glossary

- Agitprop** (Agitatsiya i propaganda), Agitation and Propaganda. A subsection of the Central Committee of the Communist Party established in August 1920, responsible for the ideological content in the arts.
- APMU** (Assotsiyatsiya proletars'kykh muzykantiv Ukraïny), Association of Proletarian Musicians of Ukraine. The Ukrainian equivalent of RAPM.
- Kuchka** (Moguchaya kuchka) 'Mighty Handful' or lit. 'Mighty Little Heap'. A group of nineteenth-century composers comprising Mily Balakirev, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Aleksandr Borodin, Modest Musorgsky, and César Cui. Following in Glinka's footsteps, they became highly influential in shaping the Russian nationalist school of musical composition.
- Muzgiz** (Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo), State Music Publisher.
- Narkompros** (Narodniy komissariat prosveshcheniya), People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. The organization founded in 1917, initially under the directorship of Anatoly Lunacharsky, to govern cultural and educational policy. It was constituted of sub-departments in charge of music (MUSO), visual art (IZO), cinema (FOTO-KINO), literature (LITO), and theatre (TEO).
- NKVD** (Narodniy komissariat vnutrennikh del), People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The name for the security police from 1934 to 1946.
- Politburo**. The Party's highest executive body, comprising an average of a dozen full and candidate (nonvoting) members led by the General Secretary (Stalin).
- RAPM** (Rossiyskaya assotsiatsiya proletarskikh muzikantov), Russian Association for Proletarian Musicians. A militant organization of musicians with the stated aim of 'extending the hegemony of the proletariat to the musical field'. It lived out a turbulent existence between 1929 and 1932, fighting against all it saw as elitist in Soviet musical life. It was permanently dissolved by government decree in 1932.
- Sovnarkom** (Sovet narodnikh komissarov), Council of People's Commissars. The principal governing organ of the Soviet Union from its creation until 1946.
- Soyuz sovetskikh kompozitorov**, Union of Soviet Composers. Founded in 1932 after the dissolution of RAPM, this was one of several creative unions whose role was to arbitrate the Soviet composing profession, including commissioning and financing new works, assessing their merits, and overseeing their performance and publication. Soon local Composers' Unions appeared in other Union Republics.
- Tsentral'niy komitet KPSS**, Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Central Committee was nominally the highest organ of the Party, although in Stalin's time the Politburo held most decision-making power
- (V)KDI** ((Vsesoyuzniy) komitet po delam iskusstv), (All-Union) Committee on Arts Affairs. The institution established in 1936 to administer all branches of the arts.

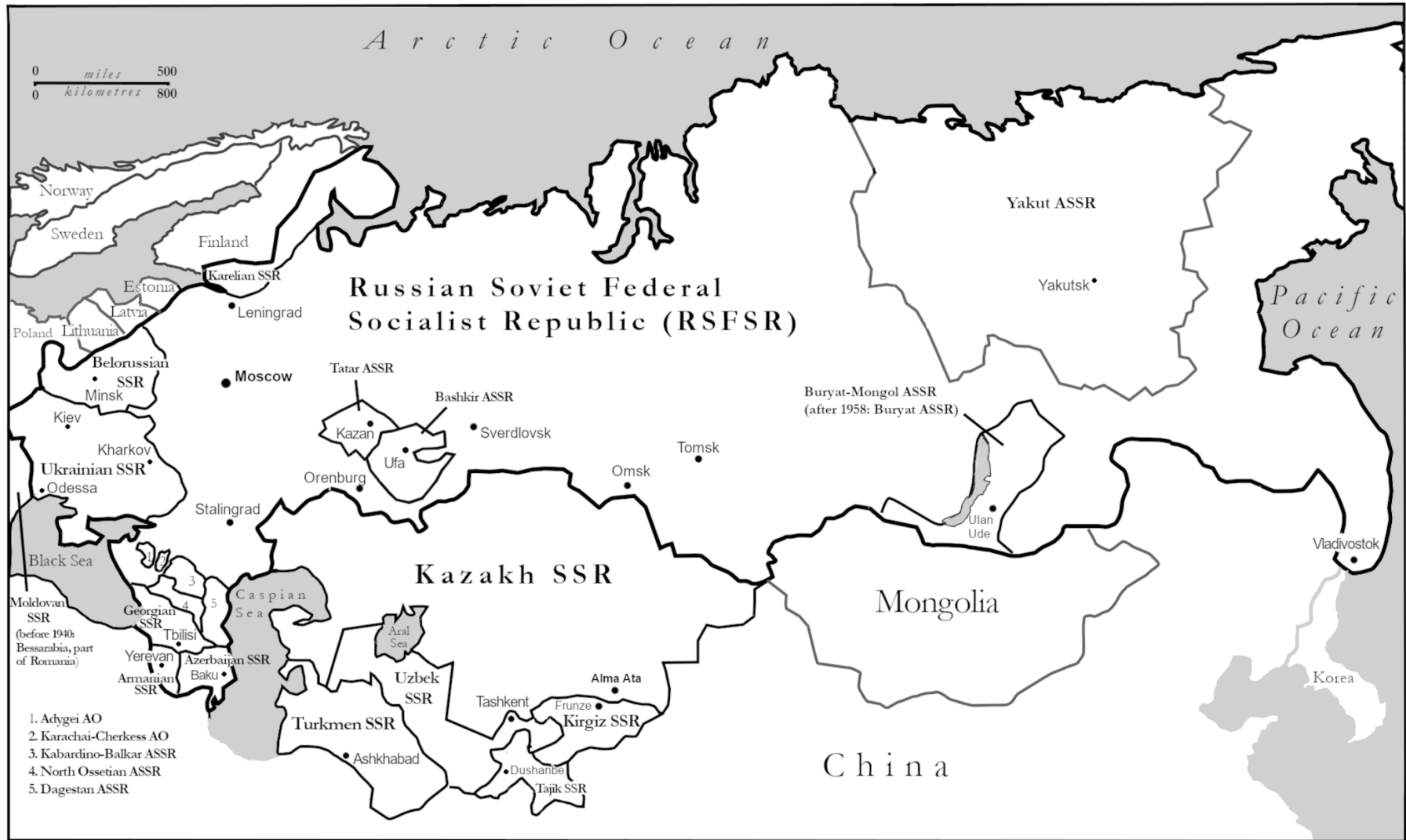


Figure 0.0. Map of republics that held dekadass in Moscow, 1936–1960.

## Introduction

On 5 March 1936, the cover of the Soviet arts newspaper *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* revealed a musical and cultural life in disarray. The headline item, ominously entitled 'Lessons', praised a series of recent *Pravda* articles that had attacked various artists, most prominently Dmitri Shostakovich. These articles, it claimed, had 'forcefully and acutely posed important artistic problems – socialist realism, artistic truth, socialist *narodnost* [populism/national character]' and had elucidated the struggle against 'formalist tricks, trivial naturalism, and artistic eclecticism'. Next came an announcement that the conductor Samuil Samosud had been awarded the Badge of Honour, likely on account of his interpretation of Ivan Dzerzhinsky's opera *The Quiet Don*. Just a week earlier, this work had been upheld as the Soviet opera *par excellence*, just as Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* had been publicly castigated. Above was an article on the overhauled Central Children's Theatre, which in a matter of weeks would be performing the newly commissioned *Peter and the Wolf* by Sergei Prokofiev, who had just been coaxed back to Russia after seventeen years in the West. Finally, inconspicuously positioned to the right of these features was the announcement of a new music festival, a so-called *dekada*, or 'ten-day festival' of Ukrainian music:

On 10 March in Moscow a musical *dekada* begins, devoted to Ukrainian music and its practitioners. The Kyiv State Opera Theatre will be participating, giving a number of performances at the Bolshoi Theatre [...].

The organization of the *dekada* is above all the manifestation of friendship, it is an important first step in the matter of cultural convergence of the brotherly peoples of our Union. The blossoming socialist Ukraine is rightly proud of its musical culture, its rich and inspiring folk music, its musicians who frequently occupy first place in our competitions [...].<sup>1</sup>

Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy provides and stimulates enormous growth and blossoming in the cultures of the peoples of our Union: culture national in form, socialist in content. Different nationalities are inimitably unique in artistic forms and languages – from Ukraine to Uzbekistan, from Kazakhstan to Georgia – not only in feelings and thoughts, but in ideas, which constitute the content and meaning of the rapidly growing socialist art of the peoples of our Union. The Ukrainian musical *dekada* organized in Moscow must mark the beginning of [other such] festivals for the unity of our national cultures, festivals for the brotherly solidarity of our peoples.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The paragraph summarizes the accomplishments of Emil Gilels and David Oistrakh in particular, both rising stars who had first studied at the Odesa Conservatory.

<sup>2</sup> 'Dekada ukrainskoy muziki', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 5 March 1936, 1.

Thus, the credo for the dekadas of national art was established: ten-day ethnic arts festivals, focused primarily on music, which sought to exhibit the cultural attainment of the non-Russian republics. Each dekada was devoted to a specific republic and would involve hundreds, sometimes thousands of participants dispatched in delegations from their home republic, attracting tens of thousands of spectators (see Table 0.1). Initially based in Moscow, some dekadas were later reported on and celebrated simultaneously in other cities across the Soviet Union. Stalin himself attended most productions of national operas, ballets, and concerts staged at the Bolshoi Theatre, accompanied by members of his inner political circle. The works performed were usually specially composed for the dekada, either by native composers or their Russian counterparts, who were usually sent to the republic years in advance to write works for the forthcoming dekada. Dekadas served political objectives, embodying the public face of Soviet nationalities policy and providing a platform on which the republics could voice 'socialist content' in their cultural vernacular. The dekadas were revived after the war in 1951 and continued precariously for almost ten years.

**Table 0.1.** List of pre-war dekadas.

Republic	Dates	Approximate number of participants	Approximate number of spectators at dekada performances
Ukraine	11–21 March 1936	500	35,000
Kazakhstan	17–23 May 1936	350	25,000
Georgia	5–15 January 1937	750	35,000
Uzbekistan	21–30 May 1937	600	30,000
Azerbaijan	5–15 April 1938	650	35,000
Kyrgyzstan	26 May – 4 June 1939	550	30,000
Armenia	20–29 October 1939	600	25,000
Belorussia	5–15 June 1940	1200	35,000
Buryat-Mongolia	20–27 October 1940	750	20,000
Tajikistan	12–20 April 1941	750*	—

*Source:* RGALI 962/21/1, 9–10.

\*The survey from which this data derives was conducted before the Tajik dekada. The Tajik dekada participant figure is taken from a letter addressed to Stalin and Molotov from the Tajik Central Committee, dated 10 March 1941 (RGASPI 17/163/1305, 81).

The Russian word *dekada* (denoting a ten-day period) derives from the French *décade*, a throwback to the decimalized calendar introduced after the French Revolution. Implemented between 1793 and 1805, the revolutionary calendar comprised twelve thirty-day months, each comprising three ten-day ‘weeks’. The Soviet neologism was symbolic rather than literal, since most dekadas lasted anywhere between a week or a fortnight. The French connection was also no accident; the mass festivals of the French Revolution were increasingly upheld as cultural models in the early days of the Soviet Union, especially influenced by the timely 1917 translation into Russian of Julien Tiersot’s *Les fêtes et les chants de la Révolution française*.<sup>3</sup> The French decimalized model had striven to secularize the monarchist and religious construction of temporality, and the Soviets hoped to do likewise. Especially from the 1920s, Soviet commentators were mindful of how festivity could subvert former traditions, effectively reconfiguring time around the celebration of Soviet values.<sup>4</sup>

Karen Petrone has demonstrated that in the 1930s a ‘celebration discourse’ developed, serving as public demonstration of the Soviet Union’s cultural successes following the five-year plan.<sup>5</sup> The dekadas became a prominent part of this discourse, celebrating and propagandizing the Soviet Union’s multinationalism and cultural attainment, manifesting the success of Stalin’s nationalities policy. Above all, they fulfilled Stalin’s demand that art be ‘national in form’ and ‘socialist in content’. This maxim evolved in various forms throughout the 1920s before its eventual canonization in Stalin’s speech at the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930.<sup>6</sup> Stalin had begun as Lenin’s Commissar for Nationality Affairs, and had authored the Party’s first political tract on the nationalities question, which was concerned with the mission of reconciling international communism in

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<sup>3</sup> Marina Raku, ‘The Phenomenon of “Translation” in Russian Musical Culture’, in Patrick Zuk and Marina Frolova-Walker (eds), *Russian Music Since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 129.

<sup>4</sup> See Malte Rolf, ‘Constructing a Soviet Time: Bolshevik Festivals and Their Rivals during the First Five-Year Plan’, *Kritika* 1/3 (2000), 447–73.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 311–12; Richard Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007), 261–65.



a multinational state. The duality of national form and socialist content was Stalin's trump card that rescued cultural nationalism from Marxist and Leninist critique: that is, that liberated from bourgeois rule nationalism could be a positive social force. Insofar as socialism could be expressed universally in any language, national self-determination should be no barrier to the transcultural operation of communism throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Although the dekadas were organized by the newly established *Komitet po delam iskusstv* (Committee on Arts Affairs, hereafter KDI), the project was indirectly Stalin's own insofar as it publicly constructed a cultural manifestation of this mission.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the dekadas as an object of study is that they open a pathway to take stock of the music of the periphery. The music of the republics remained dominant throughout Soviet-era scholarship, most notably represented by the multi-volume *History of Music of the Peoples of the USSR* edited by Yury Keldish, which remains an indispensable study despite exhibiting the politicized stance of the Brezhnev years.<sup>8</sup> Western scholarship on Soviet Music has traditionally overlooked the role of the periphery, focusing largely on musical life in Moscow and Leningrad. A glance at some general surveys of Soviet music is illustrative of this fact. Boris Schwarz's still authoritative 1972 study of Soviet music acknowledged the importance of the dekadas in Soviet musical life, though devoted barely a page to them.<sup>9</sup> Dorothea Redepenning's synoptic study devotes similarly scant attention to the dekadas, with an emphasis on the 1938 Azerbaijani festival.<sup>10</sup> Another study by Frans Lemaire's is something of an exception, living up to the promise of its title by devoting multiple chapters to the Soviet republics, though his work is largely derived from outdated secondary sources and exhibits little original research.<sup>11</sup> Another conspicuous exception is Rena Moisenko's 1949 monograph *Realist Music*, which surveyed national composers such as Brusilovsky, Hajibeyov,

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<sup>7</sup> See Yuri Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review* 53/2 (1994), 414–52.

<sup>8</sup> Yuriy Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, 5 vols (Moscow: Muzika, 1966–74).

<sup>9</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917–1981*, enl. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1983 [1972]), esp. 132–33.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothea Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und der sowjetischen Musik*, 2 vols (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 2008), I: 320ff.

<sup>11</sup> Frans Lemaire, *La musique du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle en Russie et dans les anciennes Républiques soviétiques* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), see especially Chapters 14–16.

Kiladze, Maldibayev, Paliashvili, and Spendiarov. Though her work and access to sources was impressive for its time, Moisenko displayed uncritical deference to her Soviet sources and was prone to frequent factual errors.<sup>12</sup>

In the last twenty-five years, researchers have begun to recognize the value of the *dekadas* and national music within Soviet culture more broadly. A pathbreaking study by Marina Frolova-Walker has placed the *dekadas* within the *longue durée* of Russian musical nationalism reaching back to the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Her more recent study on the Stalin Prize demonstrates the prestigious position non-Russian repertoire continued to hold, and recognizes a need for further research.<sup>14</sup> In a general survey of Soviet music, Levon Hakobian suggests that from the perspective of colonially imposed ‘Russification’ non-Russian repertoire ‘may be of considerable interest if not from artistic at least from historical and typological points of view’.<sup>15</sup> The study of *dekadas* has additionally been bolstered since the early 2000s by the emergence of archivally supported studies that have elucidated aspects of *dekada* planning in the republics.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the growing recognition of the important position the *dekadas* held in musical and cultural life, no dedicated study has yet emerged. The principal contribution to knowledge of this study, then, is to address this lacuna. It presents a reception history of national repertoire situated within the political and cultural contexts in which it arose, knitted together from many archival and other primary sources that have seldom been consulted by Western scholars. From this material arises a broader array of research questions: How did national musical culture reconcile the anticolonial principles of Stalinist

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<sup>12</sup> Rena Moisenko, *Realist Music: 25 Soviet Composers* (London: Meridian, 1949).

<sup>13</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*. Chapter 6, ‘Musical nationalism in Stalin’s Soviet Union’, is a revised version of her 1998 article ‘“National in Form and Socialist in Content”: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (1998), 331–71.

<sup>14</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), see especially Chapter 7.

<sup>15</sup> Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991*, second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017 [1998]), 49.

<sup>16</sup> Principal English-language examples include Serhy Yekelchuk, ‘Diktat and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture: Staging Patriotic Historical Opera in Soviet Ukraine, 1936–1954’, *Slavic Review* 59/3 (2000), 597–624; Michael Rouland, ‘Music and the Making of the Kazak Nation, 1920–1936’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 2005); Boram Shin, ‘National Form and Socialist Content: Soviet Modernization and Making of Uzbek National Opera Between the 1920s and 1930s’, *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 19/3 (2017), 416–433; and Kaplan, Isabelle, ‘The Art of Nation-Building: National Culture and Soviet Politics in Stalin-Era Azerbaijan and other Minority Republics’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 2017).

nationalities policy with its Tsarist imperial heritage? How did politics shape cultural life and national musical styles? How did musical transnationalism relate to the culture of Stalinism and its aftermath more broadly? How did the modes and contexts of cultural production relate between centre and periphery?

### **Opera, Realism, and the Populist Sublime**

While the dekadas came to exhibit a variety of musical and dramatic artforms, opera was by far the most prized and important. Historically, of course, the opera house has long been both a measure of cultural attainment and a forum for the assertion power, especially under imperial regimes.<sup>17</sup> Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre functioned as a site of political as well as cultural activity, with Stalin taking to its stage to ratify the Soviet constitution and deliver Party conference speeches.<sup>18</sup> With the Bolshoi at its centre, from the 1930s a project to build a network of national opera houses throughout the Soviet Union was established, and by October 1935 the count had reached thirty.<sup>19</sup> Of the republics to mount dekadas before the war, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan had already established opera houses before the Revolution.<sup>20</sup> Opera houses in Yerevan and Belorussia opened in 1933, the Abay Opera House in Kazakhstan a year later. The Navoi Theatre in Uzbekistan followed in 1939, designed by Aleksey Shchusev, whose projects included the Lenin Mausoleum and Moscow's Kazansky Railway Station. The Tajiks managed to complete their opera house during the war (1942), while the Buryat and Kyrgyz theatres, though begun in the 1930s, were not completed until 1951 and 1955 respectively. While many of the republics had established opera companies years before the construction of their opera house, these imposing columned structures in the 'Stalinist imperial' style of architecture demonstrate how Soviet nationalities policy espoused a continuation of nineteenth-century conventions of ostentatious spectacle (Figure 0.1). As

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<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Suzanne Aspden (ed.), *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>18</sup> Simon Morrison, *Bolshoi Confidential: Secrets of the Russian Ballet from the Rule of the Tsars to Today* (London: 4th Estate, 2017), xiv.

<sup>19</sup> 'Tridnadsyiy operniy teatr', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 29 October 1935, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Georgia's was completed in 1851, Azerbaijan's in 1911 but renovated in 1938. Under Soviet auspices a new opera house opened in Donetsk in 1941. This was the fourth major opera house in Ukraine joining Odesa (opened in 1810), Lviv (1900), and Kyiv (1901).

Greg Castello suggests, the ‘construction of Soviet national identities was, in a literal sense, an exhibitionist pursuit. World exhibitions served late nineteenth-century Europe as laboratories for experiments in style, as sites where nationalism was fashioned into architectural spectacle’.<sup>21</sup> Architecturally, Soviet opera houses also affirmed the classicizing agenda of socialist realism. As Evgeny Dobrenko has argued, Stalinist anti-modernism appealed to ‘beauty’ and the ‘eternal ideals’ of classicism in its reaction against bourgeois modernism.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in music, Richard Taruskin has suggested that socialist realism amounted to ‘heroic classicism’ or ‘Stalinist neoclassicism’.<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 0.1.** Stalin-era opera houses of the pre-war dekada republics.



Abay Opera House, Almaty, Kazakhstan



Alisher Navoi State Academic Bolshoi Theatre, Tashkent, Uzbekistan



Abdylas Malydybaev National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan



Aleksandr Spendiaryan Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Yerevan, Armenia



Bolshoi Theatre, Minsk, Belarus.



Tsydynzhapov Buryat State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, Ulan-Ude, Buryatia.



Ayni Theatre of Opera and Ballet, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

<sup>21</sup> Greg Castello, ‘Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and the National Question’, in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds), *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Dobrenko, ‘Socialist Realism’, Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 102–03.

<sup>23</sup> Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 517–18.

The central role of opera in Soviet culture may be traced to Anatoly Lunacharsky, Lenin's Commissar for Enlightenment, who argued against Lenin's petition for the closure of bourgeois opera houses. Frolova-Walker has described the reverence that Lunacharsky displayed towards mass celebration (*prazdnik*) of the French Revolution, for its capacity to 'organize the emotions' of the workers. Lunacharsky argued that opera could temper such celebration and prevent the descent into drunken revelry by fostering a 'noble intoxication arising from mental engagement rather than from chemical stimulus'.<sup>24</sup> Frolova-Walker suggests that the vision of Lunacharsky and his contemporaries paved the way towards a 'unified cultural policy' on opera up to the establishment of the KDI in 1936, whose primary objective was to encourage the creation of 'national operas' in the non-Russian republics.<sup>25</sup>

By 1933, with the inaugural edition of the music journal *Sovetskaya muzika* (the mouthpiece for the Composers' Union), opera was deemed to have 'the opportunity to become the primary tool for cultural, educational and agitational significance', rejecting "leftist" theories about the "withering away" of opera under the conditions of building socialism'.<sup>26</sup> But how Soviet operas could exemplify the unwieldy aesthetic of socialist realism remained problematic. Maxim Gorky had canonized the term into arts policy at the 1934 Writers' Congress, but his axioms of ideological commitment (*ideynost*), party-mindedness (*partiinnost*), and populism (*narodnost*) were formed with literature rather than music in mind. Initially, deciding what socialist realism meant for music was left to musicologists and composers, and it proved easier to pin down what it was not or should not be, rather than establishing firm stylistic traits.<sup>27</sup> Its use in music criticism was usually vague, and seldom identified concrete musical features. Alexander Ivashkin has noted that even in the notorious 1948 congress of Soviet composers, the term was used

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<sup>24</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. Ivan Susanin', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18/2 (2006), 188 (citing Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, 'O narodnikh prazdnestvakh', *Vestnik teatra* 62 (1920)).

<sup>25</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'The Soviet Opera Project', esp. 185–192.

<sup>26</sup> M. Iordanskiy, P. Kozlov, and V. Taranushchenko, 'K probleme sovetskoy operi', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1933/1, 19.

<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of such attempts, see Meri Herrala, *The Struggle of Soviet Music from 1932 to 1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 61–70.

ubiquitously but never actually defined.<sup>28</sup> The situation in the 1930s was hardly better. In April 1935 the Composers' Union held an eleven-evening discussion about the development of Soviet opera. In the few instances the subsequent report raised socialist realism, its tone was reticent:

The style of socialist realism, which figuratively reflects actual real life from the ideological standpoint of the proletariat – this style [...] defines the tasks facing Soviet composers working on opera. The material shown in this conference on opera indicates a certain aspiration on the part of composers to master new themes, to find a new musical language. In the most serious and valuable creative documents we find the seeds of a new style, we find individual achievements.<sup>29</sup>

Initially, such formulations gave composers a broad licence of interpretation, though outside official contexts the jargon of socialist realism was seldom used in music criticism.

Historically, Western scholars have been equally guilty of the uncritical use of the term, which has often been mapped vaguely onto categories of 'conformist' or 'totalitarian' music. More recently, some have questioned the utility of the term as an aesthetic musical category at all, precisely because of its amorphous contemporary usage. Pauline Fairclough rechristens socialist realist music 'middlebrow style', insofar as it sought to mediate the divide between 'high' and 'low' art.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Levon Hakobian distinguishes between socialist realism's 'empirical reality' and 'mythology', rejecting the term as a useful aesthetic category in favour of Igor Vorobyov's term 'Grand Soviet Style'.<sup>31</sup> Frolova-Walker has suggested that socialist realism in music ultimately and consistently meant the display of national aesthetics, especially the quoting of folk themes and the co-opting of nineteenth-century kuchkist principles.<sup>32</sup> To some extent, it served Soviet musical commentators well to keep definitions of Socialist Realism amorphous, especially in a

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander Ivashkin, 'Who's Afraid of Socialist Realism?', *Slavonic and East European Review* 92/3 (2014), 432.

<sup>29</sup> 'Diskussiya o sovetskoy muzike', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1935/7, 50. Operas regarded as particularly promising were Shostakovich's *Katerina Izmailova* (the early, and later resurrected title of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), Aleksandr Davidenko's *The Year 1905*, and Anatoly Aleksandrov's *Forty-First*, which was never completed.

<sup>30</sup> Fairclough, 'Was Soviet Music Middlebrow? Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, Socialist Realism, and the Mass Listener in the 1930s', *Journal of Musicology* 35/3 (2018), 336–67.

<sup>31</sup> Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era*, 78–80.

<sup>32</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, see especially 290–93. Previously, Frolova-Walker has suggested that socialist realism encompassed a recognizable though nebulous musical style that encompassed blandness, or 'the art of boredom'. See Frolova-Walker, 'The Glib, The Bland, and The Corny: An Aesthetic of Socialist Realism', in Robert Illiano (ed.), *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Frolova-Walker, 'Stalin and the Art of Boredom', *Twentieth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004), 101–24; Frolova-Walker 'From Modernism to Socialist Realism in Four Years: Myaskovsky and Asafyev', *Muzikologija* 3 (2003), 199–217.

political climate where saying the wrong thing could carry serious reprisals. On the other hand, Western scholars have sometimes overstressed Socialist Realism's opaqueness, when in fact it is hardly any more amorphous than the cluttered family of -isms which music scholars use to map out the western art music tradition.

Socialist Realism's ultimate appeal, in the sphere of music at least, was to populism. Evgeny Dobrenko has persuasively argued that the Soviet tendency towards populism marked a return to German romanticism, especially in its ambition for a 'traditionalist utopia'. The motive for this turn was not only that it encouraged art to be 'understandable to the people', but also that it helped to inscribe national mythologies.<sup>33</sup> Carl Dahlhaus called this the '*Volksgeist* hypothesis' in late-Romantic European musical thinking, whereby formerly neutral musical genres became increasingly permeated with national sentiments, whilst the 'regional and social' makeup of folk music became imbued with an increasingly romanticized 'national spirit'.<sup>34</sup> The value in a comparison of realism and populism lies in the fact that they share similarly essentializing ideals, and the mutual plasticity of both terms offers analytical insights.<sup>35</sup> The political scientist Cas Mudde has argued that populism is not an ideology but an 'ideation' or 'thin-centred ideology'. That is, it is not a fully-fledged ideological system such as liberalism or socialism, but is rather narrower in scope and not situated on the left-right political divide.<sup>36</sup> He further suggests that populism 'considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and reduces politics to an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people'.<sup>37</sup> Other scholars of populism have similarly noted an essentializing tendency in its presentation of 'the people'. Paul Taggart,

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<sup>33</sup> Dobrenko, *Late Stalinism: The Aesthetics of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 257.

<sup>34</sup> Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, Mary Whittall (trans.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 88.

<sup>35</sup> For a synoptic introduction to populism studies, see Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39/4 (2004). Populism's dislocation from the right-left political spectrum is supported, for instance, by the comparably systemic rejection of avant-garde music in Nazi Germany in 1933. See Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (London: Palgrave, 1994), 85–89. However, totalitarian readings of Soviet and Nazi art have sometimes overstressed their equivalence. For a more nuanced reading, see Levon Akopyan [Hakobian], *Fenomen Dimitriya Shostakovicha* (Saint Petersburg: RGKhA, 2018), 266–67.

<sup>37</sup> Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', 543.

for instance, refers to the conceptualization of 'the people' within populist systems as 'an idealized conception of community', while Ernesto Laclau dubs it an 'empty signifier' equating to the 'discursive production of emptiness'.<sup>38</sup> The construction of 'the people' (*narod*) in Soviet culture was similarly essentialized, yet it was precisely its status as an empty signifier that served socialist realism so well. The truth claims of socialist realism couched reality not as it was, but rather a reality that was as aspirational as it was utopian. Dobrenko even suggests that this populist aspiration of Soviet art to replace 'the real with the sublime' itself 'created the medium in which authority no longer needed the extraordinary terroristic measures that it had required in the 1930s'.<sup>39</sup>

In public discourse, the Soviet listener was reduced to a symphony- and folk-loving automaton. Thus, in 1948, among letters of radio-listeners published in *Sovetskaya muzika*, one listener from Moscow complained: 'Not a day passes that you do not praise the work of some composer, but you never discuss folk music. When will you realize that the masses expect simple music to help them relax?' Another from Stavropol gushed: 'symphonic, operatic, and chamber music of the Russian classics cannot but delight, for this music, meaningful and inspiring, creatively stirs the Soviet people'.<sup>40</sup> Yet frankly expressed views that berated mainstream Soviet music, such as this one from a Moscow listener in 1951, were quietly filed away in the archives:

I live in a dormitory with over 100 workers. When you broadcast symphonies and sonatas etc. on the radio, we workers do not understand them and so want to turn the radio straight off so that we don't have to listen to them, because there is nothing good in them. Perhaps we workers just don't understand it, but then we need help. You play Russian music for Russians, but you [also] broadcast non-Russian music, like that of Azerbaijan, which just consists of shouting and contains nothing good.<sup>41</sup>

Better placed than non-programmatic genres such as the symphony, opera was at least well-adapted to espouse the master plots and positive heroes that characterized

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 274; Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), see especially Chapters 4 and 5. Similarly,

<sup>39</sup> Dobrenko, *Late Stalinism*, 291.

<sup>40</sup> Vera Rossikhina, 'Pis'ma radioslushateley o muzike', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1948/9, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Arkadi Miller, 'Die Sowjetunion hören: Musikübertragungen im Moskauer Radio und Hörerpost in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 67/3 (2019), 402 (citing GARF 6903/1/382, 169).



socialist realist literature.<sup>42</sup> Most dekada operas followed this line by establishing a populist antagonism between the ‘pure people’ and ‘corrupt elite’. Thus, a protagonist who ‘embodies the spirit of the people’ would usually source their heroism from the masses in some way, either by drawing on their wisdom or by inciting them to revolution. Villains predictably resembled inflated bourgeois stereotypes such as greedy feudal landlords, despotic imperial leaders, or religious zealots.

Unsurprisingly, the main tenet of socialist realism that consistently arose in musical discourse was *narodnost*. Though it evoked the concrete musical trait of *narodnaya muzika* (folk music), its signification was often as empty as that of socialist realism itself. In a 1937 speech, Stalin drew on the metaphor of the Greek hero Antaeus, who drew his strength by touching ‘mother’ earth before fighting his enemies.

I think that the Bolsheviks remind us of the hero of Greek mythology, Antaeus. They, like Antaeus, are strong because they maintain connection with their mother, the masses who gave birth to them, suckled them and reared them. And as long as they maintain connection with their mother, with the people, they have every chance of remaining invincible.<sup>43</sup>

Discussing the 1937 Uzbek dekada, the party-line musicologist Georgy Khubov almost immediately applied the metaphor to music: that composers ought to pursue an Antaeus-like devotion to folk music.<sup>44</sup> A year later, he pushed folksong mania to its preposterous *reductio ad absurdum*: that all successful composers throughout history had always grounded their work in folk music:

All great masters, all great composers of the past (of all peoples, without exception!) started out from [folk music]. And, on the contrary, those who were locked in a narrow world of shallow, subjective feelings, and tried to “create [music] out of themselves” – eventually found that they had departed from the culture of the people. Their false creations were rejected by the people, because the people will never tolerate a fraud.<sup>45</sup>

However, in addition to drawing on this primordial conception of folk music, introducing European musical forms to the ‘backward’ Eastern Soviet republics remained a priority, and reconciling the East–West dichotomy proved to be a difficult balancing act.

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<sup>42</sup> See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Works* (London: Red Star Press, 1978), XIV: 291–92.

<sup>44</sup> Georgiy Khubov, ‘Muzikal’noye iskusstvo Uzbekistana’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1937/3, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Georgiy Khubov, ‘Sovetskaya opera’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/1, 15. Quoted in Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 316.

Discussing Kazakh music in somewhat patronizing terms, for example, Boris Asafiev suggested that integrating European music such as the ‘high-emotional stock’ of Beethovenian symphonism would serve to enrich its social qualities, which had evolved ‘under the terrible oppression of Russian tsarism’.<sup>46</sup> But in broader terms, the musical co-opting of authentic *narodnost* was touted as a kind of reactive modernism, as a superior aesthetic alternative to the supposedly debauched ‘formalist’ modernism of the West.<sup>47</sup>

Khubov, again, opined:

Hearing again and again the Georgian opera *Abesalom and Eteri*, the Kazakh poetry in the songs of *Kiz-Zhibek*, or the Uzbek musical tale of *Farkhad i Shirin*, [one cannot help] mentally comparing them to the consumptive art of the Western formalists.<sup>48</sup>

A year later, the musical functionary Moisey Grinberg rendered this argument more explicit, proposing that transcultural dialogue between folk and European classical music was the only morally defensible way forward. Appointed by Platon Kerzhentsev to a prominent position in the KDI, Grinberg was perhaps the most influential musicologist in the Soviet Union at the time.<sup>49</sup> In a 1938 article ‘A New Era in Music’, he mocked the theory posited by certain unnamed (and likely imagined) musicians that ‘all sounds have been exhausted’ and the end of tonality had arrived, a theory presiding over ‘the decline of art in the bourgeois West’. Grinberg insisted that operas presented at the *dekadas* proved that ‘all sounds have not been exhausted’, but rather ‘the introduction of the European sound system into music of the peoples of the Soviet East has opened up an inexhaustible new source of the richest sound combinations’. For Grinberg, in just their second year of existence the *dekadas* had already come to manifest a new vision for Soviet modernity: ‘the gigantic significance of the *dekadas* of national art is not just that they introduce us to the music of fraternal peoples, but also that they reveal the process of

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<sup>46</sup> Boris Asaf’yev, ‘Muzika Kazakhstana’, *Izvestiya*, 27 May 1936, repr. in *B. Asaf’yev o narodnoy muzike*, I. Zemtsovskiy and A. Kunanbayeva (eds) (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1987), 72.

<sup>47</sup> J.P.E. Harper Scott has coined the term ‘reactive modernism’ (derived from the work of Alain Badiou) to describe modernist trends that defy Western orthodoxies beyond the unsatisfactory progressive/conservative binary. See Harper-Scott, ‘Reactive Modernism’, in Björn Heile and Charles Wilson (eds), *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music* (London: Routledge, 2018), 155-74. See also Dobrenko, *Late Stalinism*, 244.

<sup>48</sup> Georgiy Khubov, ‘Muzikal’noye iskusstvo Uzbekistana’, 6.

<sup>49</sup> See Leonid Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki: Stalinskaya kul’turnaya revolyutsiya 1936–1938* (Moscow: Yuridicheskaya kniga, 1997), 59.

merging, interpenetration [*vzaimoproniknoveniya*], and reunification of musical cultures'.<sup>50</sup> That folk music could form that basis of an alternative to Western modernism outlived the Stalin era. For example, when Shostakovich was interviewed at the 1959 Warsaw Autumn Festival, he declared that 'Soviet composers have no need to experiment with atonal music, since before them lies not only the entire wealth of Russian music, but also the almost untouched virgin soil of folk music of the non-Russian republics'.<sup>51</sup>

Of course, Khubov and Grinberg's assertion that the West had turned its back on folk music was a generalization born of convenience. While hostility towards the music of 'the masses' has been present in twentieth-century Western criticism from Adorno to Boulez, folk music seems to have been immune to such prejudice.<sup>52</sup> In the 1920s and '30s, Western composers turning to folk idioms and more accessible styles were so numerous that an exhaustive list would be unwieldy. As Boris Groys has argued, while Western modernism's 'big Other' was popular culture, socialist realism constructed a modernist discourse whose 'big Other' was bourgeois Western music itself.<sup>53</sup> Since the notion of an 'upper class' was supposed to have been firmly eradicated by the 1930s, the 'bourgeois' other had to be rooted elsewhere. But the appeal of this othering of the 'bourgeois West' was ultimately populist.

### **Soviet Transnationalism and the Imperial Sublime**

As with the populist sublime, a growing emphasis on imperial imagery in Soviet culture equally harked back to romantic ideals. Katerina Clark has noted that Moscow in the mid-1930s saw a rise in European cosmopolitanism, as well as a resurgence in the romantic

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<sup>50</sup> Grinberg, 'Novaya èra muziki', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 18 April 1938, 2. It is worth noting that while 'interpenetration' suggests mutual cultural interaction, in Soviet discourse words like 'merging' and 'reunification' were often code for Russification. For many, Russian culture was considered both neutral territory and as a default for cultural modernity. See Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment', 434–35.

<sup>51</sup> Dmitriy Shostakovich, 'Shirokiye massi verni nastoyashchey muzike', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1959/11, 6.

<sup>52</sup> See Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, 'On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music', in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (eds), *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000), 16.

<sup>53</sup> Boris Groys, 'A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism', in Lahusen and Dobrenko (eds), *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, 76–90.

ideal of the 'imperial sublime'.<sup>54</sup> This cultural turn to imperial nostalgia lasted as long as the Soviet Union itself. Yuri Slezkine suggests that the Soviet promotion of national culture from the 1930s throughout that Soviet era was 'the most visible (and apparently least popular) aspects of Soviet official culture'.<sup>55</sup> The new approach is traceable to a *volte face* in cultural policy towards nationalities at the beginning of the 1930s. Until the late 1920s, official national policy had been Lenin's: that the imperial legacy of Russia's nationalism constituted 'great-power chauvinism' over the oppressed smaller republics, a supposedly dangerous force next to the healthy 'small-power' nationalism of the republics. But from the 1930s, Stalin's suspicion of local autonomy drove him to reintroduce a softened imperial rhetoric that legitimized more intervention from Moscow. In the new 'friendship of the peoples' policy, Russian nationalism as a benevolent 'big brother' gained parity with that of other nations.<sup>56</sup> In 1929, Stalin personally spelled out this new cultural interventionism:

We stand for an affirmative policy [*pokrovitel'stvennaya politika*] in relation to the development of national cultures and the backward nationalities. I emphasize this so that [it will] be understood that we are not indifferent, but actively supporting [*pokrovitel'tvuyushchiye*] the development of national culture.<sup>57</sup>

Stalin defended such intervention by stressing the need to galvanize local cultural attainment rather than simply to impose Russian culture.

Given the growing interest in culture from the republics and the growing role of Russian interventionism, many scholars have relied on cultural imperialism as the main framework for discussing the nationalist climate that the *dekadas* occupied. Frolova-Walker sees the *dekadas* as a manifestation of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, whereby oppressed national cultures were controlled by a hegemonic centre, and thus expressions of peripheral nationalism were essentialized into 'exotic fantasies, most often with stereotypes of femininity, and erotic associations'.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Richard Taruskin

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<sup>54</sup> Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment', 448.

<sup>56</sup> See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 356–62, 432–37.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>58</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 329. See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]).

argued that the dekadas validated a totalitarian imperial agenda insofar as they were bound up in Stalin's personal dictatorship.<sup>59</sup> Terry Martin concludes that through a turn to primordialism, the dekadas inadvertently reaffirmed essentializing clichés of national culture, whilst Jeremy Smith has described the presentation of 'national kitsch' as a closely controlled process whereby 'national cultures became rooted in an eternal past, with little or no modern dynamic'.<sup>60</sup> Boram Shin has argued that the development of Uzbek opera for the 1937 dekada exhibited the 'imperialistic nature of Soviet modernization that overrode a local mode of modernity'.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Isabelle Kaplan has suggested that the dekadas harnessed cultural transactionalism to create an 'all-Union, multi-ethnic artistic canon' that served to reinforce a pan-Soviet identity.<sup>62</sup> Knar Abrahamyan locates Soviet national opera within a theory of 'drastic hybridity', marrying the postcolonial notion of 'mutual self-definition' with Soviet imperial political aims.<sup>63</sup>

Others have argued for a more decentrist approach, pointing to evidence that Soviet transculturalism exhibited some nuance in its cultural exchange. For instance, through archival research in both Russia and Kazakhstan, Michael Rouland has shown that during preparations for the 1936 Kazakh dekada local authorities retained a high level of autonomy with respect to musical policymaking. He suggests that overemphasizing colonial aspects 'ignores the possibility of a malleable modernizing identity or cultural transformation as Kazak[h] music incorporated a multitude of influences at various levels (i.e. tonal qualities, textual references, compositional styles)'.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Ivan Sablin, Alexander Wolkow, and Darja Dobatkina consider three Russian-Soviet composers who evoked the republics in their music: Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, Sergey Vasilenko, and

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), see Chapter 9, 'The Ghetto and the Imperium', 233–302.

<sup>60</sup> Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 443; Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and After the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 117.

<sup>61</sup> Boram Shin, 'National Form and Socialist Content: Soviet Modernization and Making of Uzbek National Opera Between the 1920s and 1930s', *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 19/3 (2017), 416–433.

<sup>62</sup> Isabelle Kaplan, 'Comrades in Arts: The Soviet Dekada of National Art and the Friendship of Peoples', *Journal of Russian History* 19/1 (2020), 78–94.

<sup>63</sup> Knar Abrahamyan, 'Opera as Statecraft in Soviet Armenia and Kazakhstan' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2022), 22–28.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Rouland, 'Music and the Making of the Kazak Nation, 1920–1936' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 2005), 363–64.

Reinhold Glière. These authors posit ‘transculturation’ (*Transkulturalität*) as a more nuanced descriptor than ‘orientalism’ for describing Soviet intercultural musical exchange, and introduce the concept of asymmetry or ‘asymmetric interdependencies’ to describe imbalances of power. They suggest that this perspective, shifting from a colonial standpoint towards transnationalism, ‘makes it possible to grasp the ambiguity of the “Europe–Asia” dichotomy and the inherent dynamism of individual composers’.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, a recent issue of *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* has offered a collection of articles reassessing music and the multinational experience in the late-Soviet period, especially from the perspective of transnationalism.<sup>66</sup>

The Soviet Union’s status as an empire has long been a matter for debate. Mark Beissinger, for instance, has argued that the term ‘Soviet empire’ is useful insofar as the Soviet Union bore a ‘family resemblance’ to bygone empires.<sup>67</sup> Writing in 1916 from his comfortable exile in Switzerland, Lenin famously dubbed imperialism ‘the highest stage of capitalism’, just about the worst affront a communist could have mustered about anything.<sup>68</sup> Having subjected the very notion of empire to a devastating critique, a year later he unwittingly found himself in charge of one, and his anticolonialist theories had awkwardly to become practice. But the establishment of the Soviet Union and aftermath of the First World War coincided with a broader decline in world empires, and Lenin’s federative and socialist brand of governance proved attractive to an increasingly decolonized world. This was not only because it preached anti-imperialism, but also owed much to a sense that the Soviet recipe of rapid industrialization promised the means of undoing the ‘backwardness’ that empires had long perpetuated over their subjects.<sup>69</sup> For a subsequent generation of Cold War Western commentators from Richard Pipes to Ronald

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<sup>65</sup> Ivan Sablin, Alexander Wolkow, and Darja Dobatkina, ‘Vom Orientalismus zur Transkulturalität’, Igor Narskij (ed.), *Hochkultur für das Volk?: Literatur, Kunst, und Musik in der Sowjetunion aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 160. My thanks to Valérie Pozner for bringing this source to my attention.

<sup>66</sup> *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 67/3 (2019). See especially the introductory article: Manfred Zeller and Moritz Florin ‘Einführung: Sowjetische Klangwelten und multinationale Erfahrung in der späten Sowjetunion’, 366–371.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Beissinger, ‘Soviet Empire as “Family Resemblance”’, *Slavic Review* 65/2, 294–303.

<sup>68</sup> Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 203.

Reagan, Soviet anticolonialism was mere imperial legitimation for the 'evil empire'.<sup>70</sup> More recent scholarship has begun to demonstrate ways in which anticolonialism was not always empty propaganda, but could be substantiated by concrete policies that addressed national inequalities, especially in the cultural sphere.<sup>71</sup> In the discourse surrounding the *dekadas*, the English loanword *orientalism* is widely used as a pejorative to decry perceived cultural imperialism (especially in Western culture), often used remarkably presciently with respect to the sense in which it would later be made famous in the work of Edward Said. At other times, the Soviet tendency to idealize the imperial sublime nullified critique of some of the more colonialist aspects of its own operation.

Ultimately, the Soviet Union's relationship with its imperial heritage remained complex and contradictory, constituting a nominally anticolonial state that nonetheless exhibited coercive and imperialist tendencies. Soviet Union could be both empire and anti-empire, depending on the context and frame of reference. The theoretical basis of this thesis is especially guided by the recent trend in Soviet studies to nuance this dichotomy by introducing the concepts of transnationalism, 'new spatial history' or 'new imperial history'.<sup>72</sup> In Western scholarship, this turn has resulted from the interface between imperial and postcolonial studies, also influenced by the evolving notion of nationalism as a modern and politically/socially constructed phenomenon.<sup>73</sup> Somewhat divergently, late- and post-Soviet scholarship has continued to venerate primordialist and biosociological notions of 'ethnicity' (*étnos*) in discussing national culture.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 [1955]); Reagan's infamous likening of the Soviet Union to an 'evil empire' occurred in 1983.

<sup>71</sup> See especially Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Sanna Turoma and Maxim Waldstein (eds), *Empire De/Centered: New Spatial Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). The journal *Ab Imperio*, founded in 2000, has similarly cast Russian and Soviet history primarily through a 'new imperial' lens.

<sup>73</sup> The classic studies in this regard include: Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1990]); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>74</sup> Marina Mogilner 'New Imperial History: Post-Soviet Historiography in Search of a New Paradigm for the History of Empire and Nationalism', *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* 45/2 (2014), 25–67. For a discussion of *étnos* in terms of music, see Nelli Shakhnazarova, 'Problemiñ natsional'nogo i internatsional'nogo', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1989/5, 5–12.

To reconfigure the debate around transnationalism, or to unpack the transnational qualities of a pseudo-empire such as the former Soviet Union, is not to acquit it of accusations of colonialism. Transnationalism, after all, is not the opposite of nationalism, but a means of decentring the narrative from a top-down model that prioritizes Moscow's hegemony. Neither is the transnational or the 'new imperial' turn a mere matter of historiographical intervention, since it speaks to the nature of transcultural exchange in Soviet aesthetics and cultural modernity more broadly. Francine Hirsch has referred to the complex phenomenon as 'double assimilation', that is 'the assimilation of a diverse population into nationality categories and, simultaneously, the assimilation of those nationally categorized groups into the Soviet state and society'.<sup>75</sup> The idea that the arts operated transnationally presents a fruitful way of bringing the complexities of this double assimilation into focus.

### **Scope and Structure**

The chapters of this dissertation proceed chronologically, but with contrasting emphasis on subtopics and personalities. Chapter 1 explores the first dekada of March 1936, dedicated to Ukraine. I first trace the roots of the dekada project in the early ideas of Platon Kerzhentsev, who headed the KDI from its founding in 1936. I then place the dekada repertoire in the context of post-Revolutionary Ukrainian opera, especially in the context of the *Proletkult* idea of collectivity in the arts and suppressed avant-gardism. The final section explores the tension between celebration and repression, by contrasting the celebratory context of the dekada with the denunciation of the 1937 Kyiv Opera production of Lysenko's *Taras Bulba*.

Chapter 2 turns to the Kazakh and Georgian dekadas, a point at which, I argue, the dekada project truly ossified into a symbol of high Stalinism. I also interrogate the process of musical 'professionalization' in Kazakhstan, especially surrounding the early Kazakh operas of Yevgeny Brusilovsky. The chapter closes with a discussion of

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<sup>75</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 14.



Stalin's cult of personality, focusing on how it was constructed in dekada rhetoric and how by early 1937 the dekadas had developed a cult-like status of their own. The subsequent Uzbek and Azerbaijani festivals both included contributions from Reinhold Glière, who is the principal subject of Chapter 3. I dwell on Glière's self-confessed desire to forge 'creative synthesis' between musical traditions, exemplified in his Uzbek music drama *Gyulsara* and Azerbaijani opera *Shakh-Senem*. While most literature on Glière favours a colonialist reading of his national works, I show that he conceived his role as empowering national composers towards self-sufficiency. With this in mind, I seek to construct a more nuanced understanding of transnational relationships in Glière's work.

Chapter 4 discusses the Kyrgyz and Armenian dekadas, both of 1939, contrasting the disparity in cultural attainment between the Central-Asian and Caucasian republics. I also dwell especially on how the Armenian dekada helped shape constructions of Aram Khachaturian's national identity. Chapter 5 surveys the last three of the pre-war dekadas (Belorussia, Buryat-Mongolia, and Tajikistan), especially examining how the Second World War (which the Soviet Union would not join until June 1941) was beginning to affect domestic cultural affairs. My focus in Chapter 6 shifts to the post-war era and charts the causes in the decline of the post-war dekada revival, leading to their quiet withdrawal in 1960. My archival findings suggest that a broader crisis in the genre of opera, destalinization, the growth of internationalism, and fluctuations in nationalities policy contributed to the growing public and state disenchantment with the dekada project. I provide a full list of dekada productions in Appendix 1, and I have also integrated much of this material into the text in the form of boxes to give a clear overview of dekada works to the reader, many of which are obscure.

The label 'dekada' came to refer to a wide range of cultural celebrations across the former Soviet Union and beyond. For instance, there were smaller scale dekadas of Soviet music held under the auspices of the Moscow Composers' Union in parallel with the national dekadas in the 1930s.<sup>76</sup> 'Dekadas', national or otherwise, and sometimes

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<sup>76</sup> Despite witnessing the premieres of important works such as Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony and First String Quartet, these events were often poorly organized and overly drawn out, never

quite high-profile, also continued to be mounted in Soviet cities well after 1960. In 1962 alone, for instance, Shostakovich, accompanied by various other high-ranking Soviet composers, travelled to participate in dekadas of Soviet music in Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, the national dekadas hosted in Moscow form the basis of this study. While I devote substantially more space to the pre-war dekadas than to the post-war revival, this is proportional to the cultural importance the earlier dekadas accrued (discussed in Chapter 6).

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attaining the impact of their national counterparts. See for instance, Konstantin Kuznetsov, 'Dekada sovetskoy muziki', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/1, 19–24.

<sup>77</sup> See Shostakovich, 'Happiness to All People on Earth', *Moscow News*, 23 December 1963, 13; Shostakovich, 'Ishchu libretto...', *Izvestiya*, 20 August 1963, 6; G. Mar'yanovskiy, 'Tashkent – gorod iskusstva i poëzii', *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, 26 October 1963, 1.

## Chapter 1 – Cultural Revolution in Ukrainian Music, 1936-1937

Ukrainian cultural identity held a precarious existence throughout the Soviet period. Perceptions of its supposed ‘bourgeois’ anti-Soviet nationalism were often in tension with its official right to cultural ‘self-determination’, which was only magnified by its geopolitical proximity to Poland (its former ruler) and Fascist Germany. From 1929 to 1932 the Soviet government’s official position was one of ‘Ukrainization’, an iteration of Lenin’s policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization), which aimed to nurture local language and national culture. In practice, the policy was as much about making Soviet culture seem less alien to non-Russians as with genuinely stimulating local culture. The Ukrainian language had formerly been considered a peasant language spoken in the countryside, while Russian had been the *lingua franca* of government, the academy, and urban life. In 1917, for instance, only a fifth of Kyivans spoke Ukrainian.<sup>1</sup> Ukrainization saw the mass state subsidy of Ukrainian-language culture, including an education system, books, newspapers, journals, theatre, radio, and opera. The policy held the ambitious aim of neutralizing discrimination against Ukrainians by reversing tsarist Russification, without alienating the republic’s urban population, which was predominantly comprised of Russians.<sup>2</sup>

The early 1930s witnessed intense political repression and suffering in Ukraine. In 1929–1932 Stalin implemented a two-pronged attack of ‘Dekulakization’, the killing and deportation of purportedly more affluent peasants, and Collectivization, the abolition of private land and restructuring of agrarian life under Party control. The measures resulted in the *Holodomor* (Terror-Famine) of 1932–33, directly caused by the forced removal of peasants’ grain reserves on Stalin’s orders. By recent estimates, 5 million people died of hunger in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, of whom about 3.9 million were Ukrainian.<sup>3</sup> The principal aim of this chapter is to survey Ukrainian cultural politics of 1936–37 in the context of this unstable tension between stimulation and repression of cultural life at the periphery. This invites a consideration about how musicians, composer, and policymakers

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 9.

<sup>2</sup> George Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914–1954* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016), see Chapter 5, 111–30.

<sup>3</sup> Applebaum, *Red Famine*, xxiv.

went about reforging national culture within a socialist realist aesthetic framework. Though I primarily focus on the first Ukrainian dekada of 1936, in the final section I turn to the purge of Ukrainian music and culture more broadly that unfolded in the year following the dekada. This furnishes a discussion about how political forces and professional rivalries shaped music at the periphery, inviting some reassessment of the relationship between celebration and terror in Soviet culture.

### **Platon Kerzhentsev and the Committee on Arts Affairs**

On 16 December 1935, the Politburo passed an order establishing an All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs (hereafter KDI). Its enormous scope, according to the official decree, was to 'instruct on everything in the affairs of the arts, from regulating theatres, film-organizations, musical matters, painting, sculpture and other institutions' as well as to 'create Soviets of Arts Affairs in the representative national republics'.<sup>4</sup> The Committee was formally established on 17 January when Stalin appointed Platon Kerzhentsev as its chairman.<sup>5</sup> The KDI's apparent first act, barely a week into its existence, was the public denunciation of Shostakovich. An unsigned article brutally condemning *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* appeared in *Pravda* berating its sexual naturalism, 'leftist' leanings, and the admiring critics that had paved the way to its success. The article was soon followed by a similar attack on the same composer's ballet *Bright Stream*.<sup>6</sup> The significance of these editorials was seismic, triggering discussions in the Composers' Unions of both Moscow and Leningrad, and its legacy dogged Soviet music for decades to come. Shostakovich found his public image transformed from that of a rising star to the epitome for all that was wrong in Soviet music. Despite the vitriol and public humiliation, actions against the composer did not extend to the arrest and execution that befell literary figures such as Osip Mandelstam or Vsevolod Meyerhold. *Lady Macbeth* was not even immediately

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Leonid Maksimenkov (ed.), *Muzika vmesto sumbura: Kompozitori i muzikanti v strane sovetov, 1917–1991* (Moscow: MFD, 2013), 133 (citing RGASPI 17/163/1086, 16).

<sup>5</sup> See 'O naznachenii tov. P. M. Kerzhentseva predsedatel'yem Vsesoyuznogo Komiteta po delam iskusstv pri SNK Soyuza SSR', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 17 January 1936, 2. Yakov Boyarsky and Boris Shumyatsky were appointed Kerzhentsev's deputies.

<sup>6</sup> 'Sumbur vmesto muziki', *Pravda*, 28 January 1936, 3; 'Baletnaya fal'sh', *Pravda*, 8 February 1936, 3.

removed from the repertoire, with performances continuing until 10 February in Moscow and 7 March in Leningrad.<sup>7</sup> On one level, as Sheila Fitzpatrick suggests, Shostakovich was a pawn in a wider attack against Meyerhold and more generic formalist trends.<sup>8</sup> Simo Mikkonen, following and reinforcing arguments made by Leonid Maksimenkov, suggests that the attack was an initiative of the KDI to consolidate its hegemony over the arts, since it was the sole body who stood to gain anything from the affair.<sup>9</sup>

Evidently, the *Lady Macbeth* affair showed that Kerzhentsev would lose no time in flexing the muscles of his powerful new committee. The KDI had been established to supplant the arts sector of the Narkompros, which was being increasingly weighed down by bureaucratic deadlock. Bizarre cases such as one of censors petitioning to ban radio broadcasts of a foreign composer named Franz Schubert on a hunch he might be a 'Trotskyite' had shown officials just how broken the system was.<sup>10</sup> Liberated from the hierarchy of Soviet middle management, Kerzhentsev was now only really answerable to Stalin himself. He held a 'blank cheque', to use Maksimenkov's phrase, to shape the Soviet arts how he saw fit.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Kerzhentsev was hardly divorced from Soviet bureaucracy. In many ways, he was its foremost authority. In his early work, Kerzhentsev had advocated Taylorism, the scientific practice of organizing work and time to maximize efficiency. He founded The League of Time, a movement promoting the time-efficient organization of labour.<sup>12</sup> His *Principles of Organization* had been avidly read by senior Bolsheviks in the early 1920s, the first edition selling out in months, and promising to deliver 'concise practical leadership for rank-and-file organizers in whatever sphere they worked'.<sup>13</sup> A tome of scrupulous

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<sup>7</sup> Levon Akopyan [Hakobian], *Fenomen Dmitriya Shostakovicha* (Saint Petersburg: RGKhA, 2018), 200.

<sup>8</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998)

<sup>9</sup> Mikkonen, *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 300; Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki: Stalinskaya kul'turnaya revolyutsiya 1936–1938* (Moscow: Yuridicheskaya kniga, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> A. V. Golubev, 'Yesli mir obrushitsya na nashu respubliku': *Sovetskoye obshchestvo i vneshnyaya ugroza v 1922–1941 godakh* (Moscow: Direct Media, 2019), 67 (citing TsAODM 3/50/75, 38).

<sup>11</sup> Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki*, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Visions and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 155–57.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878–1928* (London: Penguin, 2014), 435.

bureaucratic pedantry, it covered the minutiae of the organizational craft down to the comparative merits of British and American filing systems. This best-seller joined Kerzhentsev's similar treatises, such as his 1917 *How to Lead a Meeting* and the 1923 pamphlet *Organize Yourself*. Kerzhentsev's other writings covered such diverse topics as English history, walks around London, the Irish struggle for independence, a biography of Lenin, and a 500-page treatise on the Paris Commune.

But Kerzhentsev had genuine expertise and interest in the arts. A Bolshevik since 1904, his worldly interest in theatre had been fine-tuned in his years spent in exile touring Britain, America, and Japan. After returning to revolutionary Petrograd from New York (probably with Trotsky)<sup>14</sup> he headed the theatre section of Proletkult, an early revolutionary organ for cultural affairs, where he was responsible for the movement's most influential theoretical literature. His most significant work *Creative Theatre* formulated a new vision for proletarian theatre, synthesized from an impressive range of American, European, and Russian theoretical literature. He argued that proletarian theatre had to be not just 'for' but 'of' the people, that its task was 'to facilitate the full artistic emergence of the proletarian "self" [ya] in harmonious collective theatrical creativity'.<sup>15</sup> To illustrate his theory, Kerzhentsev drew on his experiences of collective theatre and mass spectacle in the West. His 'most intense theatre experience' was an unlikely performance of *The Legend of St George in Hampstead*, London.<sup>16</sup> It impressed the Russian visitor by comprising an army of local amateurs (according to Kerzhentsev, 8 percent of the local population were directly involved in the production).<sup>17</sup> From such experiences he formulated the concept of 'collective creativity', a vision of proletarian theatre that would include non-professionals in various roles, so diminishing the distance between spectator and performer. The blending of the amateur and professional spheres became common

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<sup>14</sup> Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskiy teatr*, fifth ed. (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1923 [1918]), 67.

<sup>16</sup> Kerzhentsev does not give a date of the performance but a local newspaper of 1914 announced 'On the Pageant Field of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, in the presence of very large audiences, afternoon and evening performances were given on Saturday of "A Mystery of the Renowned and Valorous Knight Saint George of England," as newly edited and set forth by Mr. Frank Stuart Murray and Mr. John Armistead'. This is most likely the performance to which Kerzhentsev alludes. *Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette*, 27 June 1914, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–50.

dekada practices, especially in Central Asia. Works for the 1937 Uzbek dekada involved singers propelled to stardom who just months earlier had been construction workers and collective farmers. They now worked alongside prestigious musicians such as composer Reinhold Glière and the Moscow-trained opera singer Khalima Nasirova.<sup>18</sup>

Kerzhentsev had long advocated the role of mass festivals as the necessary means of interface between art and society. From his experience in America, Kerzhentsev upheld the 'monumental spectacle' of New York's Shakespeare tercentenary in 1916, involving an open-air performance to a crowd of 18,000.<sup>19</sup> He also cited Romain Rolland, taking particular interest in his call to revive the mass festivals of the French Revolution. In 1919, a year after the first edition of *Creative Theatre* was published, Kerzhentsev spoke at a conference for Worker-Peasant theatre. His speech, titled 'On Festivals of the People', contended that mass festivals could be 'a means of political education, a rallying point for the slogans of the day' and 'a means to introduce the masses to all manifestations of art'.<sup>20</sup>

The Kerzhentsev of the 1920s was far more frosty towards opera. He had positioned himself as a long-standing critic of Anatoly Lunacharsky, the head of Narkompros, who had defended opera's survival against Lenin's critical assessment.<sup>21</sup> In *Creative Theatre* Kerzhentsev followed Lenin, insisting that opera was unsalvageable from its bourgeois roots. This 'most traditional, ossified and expensive art form' had been 'brought up under the wing of absolutism and bourgeois patronage', and so its commitment to tradition left 'simply no potential for innovation'.<sup>22</sup> In 1928 Kerzhentsev became the deputy head of Agitprop, and used his ever-increasing influence to return to the subject of opera. In a 1928 *Pravda* article entitled 'The Trouble with Opera', he

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<sup>18</sup> M. Mukhamedov, 'Kak mī gotovilis' k dekadē', *Pravda*, 20 May 1937, 4. The article raves about the 'beautiful voice' of the Tashkent construction worker Ismailov who sang the role of Tashmata-ata in Glière's *Gyul'sara*, and the 'capable soprano' and collective farmer O. Dadabayeva who also sang in *Gyul'sara*. Similar tactics were used for the Tajik dekada in 1941. See Alikul Imamov, 'Kak prokhozila podgotovka k dekadē', *Tadzhikistanskaya pravda*, 12 April 1941.

<sup>19</sup> Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskiy teatr*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in James Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 137 (citing GARF 628/1/4, no list given).

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion, see Frolova-Walker, 'The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. Ivan Susanin', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18/2 (2006), 186–89. In *Creative Theatre*, Kerzhentsev explicitly pits his anti-opera stance against Lunacharsky (*Tvorcheskiy teatr*, 225).

<sup>22</sup> Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskiy teatr*, 226.

mellowed towards the genre itself, but chastised the failure of the Bolshoi to produce operas on contemporary themes.<sup>23</sup>

Kerzhentsev had an evolving sense of how 'collective creativity' could operate across national boundaries. In 1921 he insisted that proletarian culture should be founded on class rather than bourgeois notions of nationalism. International culture, the 'complete agreement and friendly mutual assistance' between proletarian cultures, would only occur when they became 'identical down to the details'.<sup>24</sup> By the end of the decade Kerzhentsev demonstrated, if only strategically, a mellowing towards national difference in Soviet art. In 1929 he capitalized on a visiting group of Ukrainian writers, who were visiting as part of a national 'Ukrainian week' (*ukrainskaya nedelya*),<sup>25</sup> to make a point about national art, again at Lunacharsky's expense:

Some have not yet freed themselves from great-power chauvinism and look down on the cultures of Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, and others. We are not doing everything to fix our mistakes. Our foremost theatre, the Moscow Art Theatre, is still staging a play that perversely misrepresents the Ukrainian revolutionary movement and insults Ukrainians. And the leading figure responsible for the theatre at Narkompros [Lunacharsky] remains insensitive to the harm being done to Ukrainian relations.<sup>26</sup>

The work to which Kerzhentsev referred was Mikhail Bulgakov's play *Days of the Turbins*, whose staging had been Lunacharsky's initiative. For some critics, the play had become a symbol of the 'fellow travellers', those composers, writers, and artists who refused to turn fully to proletarian art. In a caustic assault of the play in 1926, the writer Mayakovsky chided: 'We accidentally gave Bulgakov the opportunity to squeak at the hands of the bourgeoisie – and he squeaked. And we will not tolerate this'.<sup>27</sup> Kerzhentsev was promoting the views of a visiting Ukrainian delegation, who met with Stalin to petition for the play's removal due to its supposedly anti-Ukrainian sentiment.<sup>28</sup> Lunacharsky was so

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<sup>23</sup> Kerzhentsev, 'Neblagopoluchiye s operoy', *Pravda*, 10 April 1928, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Kerzhentsev, *K novoy kul'ture* (Petrograd: Gos. izd-vo, 1921), quoted in Zenovia Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 147.

<sup>25</sup> Between 1929–1931 a handful of such national literary 'weeks' were held in which non-Russian writers were invited to Moscow. See Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 434.

<sup>26</sup> Kerzhentsev, 'Ukrainskiye pisateli v Moskve', *Pravda*, 9 February 1929, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Kshishtof Meyer (Krzysztof Meyer), *Shostakovich: Zhizn', tvorchestvo, vremya* (Saint Petersburg: DSCH, 1998), 71–72.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed discussion of the affair and verbatim transcript of the discussion with Stalin, see Leonid Maksimenkov, 'Stalin's Meeting with a Delegation of Ukrainian Writers on 12 February 1929' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 16 (1992), 361–431.



incensed by Kerzhentsev's article that he wrote directly to Stalin, noting that the Politburo had directly approved the play's staging three years earlier. He attacked the duplicity, claiming that Kerzhentsev's article was an engineered charade to undermine his position in Narkompros.<sup>29</sup> But Kerzhentsev's position in the *Turbins* affair showed his willingness to argue for a fluid national discourse in the arts in preference to the 'great-power chauvinist' attitude that surveyed art imperialistically. He closed his article by referencing Stalin's appeal for art 'national in form and socialist in content' and insisting that 'we must create a living exchange between the national cultures of the USSR, and resolutely fight against great-power and national chauvinists'.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it seems that at least fragments of Kerzhentsev's vision for the dekadas were formed by the end of the 1920s, and these ideas can only have helped him secure the KDI chairmanship. On 10 February 1936 at a plenum for the Union of Art Workers, just weeks into his new role, Kerzhentsev affirmed the transnational focus of his new committee:

The government's decision to set up the Committee [...] places on our shoulders the obligation to think about art in all the union and autonomous republics, in all territories and regions. We currently have a wide communion of national arts. Ukraine's work in the arts is exceptional – suffice it to say that Ukraine spends several times more on art proportional to its budget than Russia – and yet Moscow has never hosted a single major Ukrainian theatre, nor shown a Ukrainian opera. The work of Georgian composers is virtually unknown in Moscow. We have a vast number of national artists of our country's republics who should be widely known, but because they are *narodniy* [folk/national], many of them are unknown to Russians, and unknown because they are native artists of Ukraine or Georgia.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the KDI's 'all-Union' status gave it licence to oversee a hierarchy of subcommittees in the republics. At its inception, the KDI supervised seventy subordinate arts committees in the republics.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, it was far better placed to foster transnational exchange than the Composers' Unions. While the Writers' Union had held its first all-union congress in 1934, its musical counterpart would not do so until after the war,

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<sup>29</sup> Anatoly Smeliansky, 'The Destroyers: Lunacharsky's Letter to Stalin on Censorship at the Moscow Arts Theatre', *Comparative Criticism* 16 (1994), 33–37.

<sup>30</sup> Kerzhentsev, 'Ukrainskiye pisateli', 2.

<sup>31</sup> 'Stroitel'stvo sotsialisticheskogo iskusstva: Vistupleniye P. M. Kerzhentseva na III plenumе TsK RABIS', *Sovetskoye iskusstva*, 17 February 1936, 2.

<sup>32</sup> É. Shulepova, 'Sozdaniye i nachalo deyatelnosti komiteta po delam iskusstv (1936–1941)', *Voprosi istorii* 1977/1, 49 (citing RGALI 962/3/203, 6–9).

despite grumbling amongst certain members.<sup>33</sup> Notwithstanding the KDI's overall authority, Maksimenkov suggests that the Union Republics retained much autonomy in cultural matters even after 1936.<sup>34</sup> As such, each *dekada* was organised primarily by authorities in its home republic. Preparations were often overseen at the very highest level of government. For instance, Lavrenty Beria, who governed Georgia during the time of its 1937 *dekada*, would personally attend rehearsals and proffer ill-informed advice to performers.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the local autonomy, the KDI could still enforce heavy-handed intervention where it saw fit, especially in Central Asia where Western-style musical culture was in its infancy (see Chapter 4). KDI representatives, directors, singing coaches, composers, choreographers, and various professionals were often sent for extended trips to act as consultants. Often the extent of these visits was so unprecedented that they required special legislation from the Central Committee. For instance, one problem emerged in that business trips under Sovnarkom's rules could not exceed three months, but *dekada* consultants would often require relocating for over a year. After a petition from the KDI, it was agreed that artists working away on consultancy for the *dekadas* could receive a salary equal to that of their main job up to the value of five thousand roubles. KDI staff working away on *dekada* business would receive an additional bonus of half their salary throughout their trip.<sup>36</sup> This episode demonstrates the extent of the powers afforded to the new arts establishment. Bureaucratic obstacles that had impeded much of Soviet artistic life were no impediment to Kerzhentsev's vision.

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<sup>33</sup> At a 1936 meeting of the Leningrad Composers' Union, the composer Pyotr Ryazanov insisted 'it is now time to raise the question of establishing a congress of Soviet composers. We have no exchange of experience between the composers of Moscow, Ukraine, etc. We are positioned in isolated camps, in which the creative practice of each organization is mutually exclusive from the other. The practice of creative exchange would give extremely fruitful results'. Marina Rahmanova (ed.), *Shostakovich – Urtext* (Moscow: GTsMMK, 2006), 330.

<sup>34</sup> Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki*, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Sergo Beriia, *Moy otets Beriia: V koridorakh stalinskoy vlasti* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 46. See also Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> GARF R-5446/25/3439, 16.

## The Ukrainian Dekada

**Box 1.1.** Principal productions of the Ukrainian dekada, 11–21 March 1936.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
11*, 12 (matinée), 13, 17, 20	Semyon Hulak-Artemovsky, <i>Zaporozhets za Dunayem</i> [A Cossack Beyond the Danube] (1863)	Opera
12*, 15, 19	Nikolai Rimsky-Kosakov, <i>Snegurochka</i> [The Snow Maiden] (1882)	Opera
14*, 16, 18 (matinée and evening)	Mykola Lysenko, <i>Natalka-Poltavka</i> [Natalka from Poltava] (1889)	Opera
21*	Concert	

\* Attended by Stalin.

The first dekada, dedicated to Ukraine, was scheduled to begin on 11 March 1936, barely six weeks after the KDI's establishment. Kerzhentsev was clearly keen to show how quickly he could pull together the enormous event, but there was hardly much planning to do. As a well-established company, the Kyiv Opera already had glossy national opera productions in its repertoire, and these were shipped wholesale to Moscow, including sets, props, and costumes.<sup>37</sup> The Kyivans brought three operas to Moscow. The first two were updated versions of nineteenth-century works: *The Zaporozhian Cossack Beyond the Danube* by opera-singer-turned-composer Semyon Hulak-Artemovsky and *Natalka-Poltavka* by Mykola Lysenko. Both came newly furnished with Ukrainian-language librettos by Maksim Rylsky and were recomposed by Volodymyr Yorysh, who also conducted the dekada performances. Added to the bill was a Ukrainian-language production of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka* (*The Snow Maiden*, 1882).

The Ukrainians sent around 450 *dekadniki* to Moscow, mostly comprising the chorus, ballet cast, orchestra, and technical staff of the opera house. They departed Kyiv by train on 7 March and arrived the following day.<sup>38</sup> Even then, the arrival of the delegation was a ceremonial affair, and some newspapers ran photographs taken at the official welcome on the station platform (Figure 1.1).<sup>39</sup> It seems that such press coverage

<sup>37</sup> See letter from Andrei Khvylya to Kerzhentsev. RGALI 962/21/67, 19–20.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 19. The sets, props and production materials had been sent a week earlier.

<sup>39</sup> 'Ukrainskiy teatr operi i baleta viyekhal v Moskvu', *Pravda*, 8 March 1936, 8; *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* 11 March 1936, 1.

and promotional materials for the festival managed to stir up public anticipation. The musicologist Konstantin Kuznetsov (writing under his pseudonym A. Constant Smith) reported that tickets had been 'literally fought for, and sold out in no time' and that the musical contributions to the festival represented 'an event of considerable historical importance and social significance'.<sup>40</sup>

**Figure 1.1.** The arrival of the Ukrainians at Kiyevsky railway station, Moscow.



Source: *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* 11 March 1936, 1. Left to right: Mikhail Donets (bass), Mariya Litvinenko-Volhemut (soprano), Andrey Khvylya (Ukrainian minister for culture), and Yakov Boyarsky (deputy KDI chairman).

The dekada's historical and social significance was given official credence in an unsigned Party announcement in *Pravda* two days after the dekada, praising the 'masters of Ukrainian art' and their broader social impact.<sup>41</sup> The pronouncement had actually been crafted by David Zaslavsky, the same *Pravda* staff writer who had written the unsigned editorials condemning Shostakovich weeks earlier.<sup>42</sup> He applauded the way that the dekada had shown 'the place of the arts in socialist construction'. For Zaslavsky, the

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<sup>40</sup> A. Constant Smith, 'New Comments on Soviet Music', *Moscow News*, 25 March 1936.

<sup>41</sup> [David Zaslavsky], 'Mastery ukrainskogo iskusstva', *Pravda*, 24 March 1936, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Zaslavsky's authorship of the *Pravda* editorials condemning Shostakovich has been demonstrated by Yevgeny Yefimov. The same document that Yefimov uses to show Zaslavsky's authorship of the Shostakovich editorials also names Zaslavsky as author of 'Masters of Ukrainian Art'. RGALI 2846/1/75, 55, facsimile reproduction in Yefimov, *Sumbur vokrug 'sumbura' i odnogo 'malenkogo zhurnalista'* (Moscow: Flinta, 2006), 53.

dekada had toppled art from its elitist perch and reclaimed opera for the masses, no longer ‘entertainment for the wealthy as in capitalist countries’ or ‘a commercial venture for impresarios’. The report contended that the dekada had affirmed the necessary place of the arts ‘for the growth of the country and for a cultured society’. Zaslavsky signed off with a mawkish paraphrasing of Stalin’s ‘life has become better’<sup>43</sup> aphorism: ‘when life becomes better, when to live becomes more joyous, a song rings out and the whole country resounds with joyful voices’.<sup>44</sup>

No time or expense was spared to ensure the dekada’s success in the public imagination. Stalin himself attended the first performance of *Natalka-Poltavka*, accompanied by Molotov, Kaganovich, and other officials.<sup>45</sup> At the end of the performance Stalin applauded, eliciting a ‘hurrah’ to the leader from the entire Ukrainian cast.<sup>46</sup> On the final day of the dekada there was a monumental final concert in which the Ukrainian opera cast reprised various opera numbers. The concert, which was again attended by Stalin, also featured performances from the ‘Dumka’ folk choir, an ensemble of bandura players and a women’s choir, who had been giving informal concerts at various locations around Moscow throughout the dekada.<sup>47</sup>

The Ukrainian State Opera and Ballet was awarded the Order of Lenin, the first time it had been given to a theatre.<sup>48</sup> Individuals were also awarded. The highest honour

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<sup>43</sup> The phrase was first used by Stalin at a meeting of Stakhanovites (celebrated workers who exceeded production quotas) in 1935, and soon became canonical.

<sup>44</sup> [Zaslavsky], ‘Mastery ukrainskogo iskusstva’, 1.

<sup>45</sup> According to the memoir of Yelena Bulgakova (wife of the author of the aforementioned *Day of the Turbins*) Stalin only arrived for the second act. See Lidiya Yanovskaya (ed.), *Dnevnik Yeleni Bulgakova* (Moscow: Knizhnaya palata, 1990), 117.

<sup>46</sup> See ‘Uspeshniye gastroli ukrainskoy operi v Moskve’, *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 16 March 1936, 1. Simo Mikkonen claims that Stalin attended every production at the Ukrainian dekada, but I have found no evidence he attended either *Cossack beyond the Danube* or *The Snow Maiden*, though there was certainly government presence at all the productions. Mikkonen, “Muddle instead of Music” in 1936: Cataclysm of Musical Administration’, *Shostakovich Studies 2*, Pauline Fairclough (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236. On government presence at all productions, see the transcript of Kerzhentsev’s speech at the dekada’s final reception: RGALI 962/21/69, 1.

<sup>47</sup> ‘Ukrainskaya pesnya i tanets’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 23 March 1936, 1. Hryhory Kytasty, who performed at the dekada in a minor role as a bandura player, recalls how the NKVD attended rehearsals for the concert to review security. According to Kytasty’s memoir, the secret police supposedly forbade the throwing of flowers into the audience, concerned that a bomb might be thrown at Stalin. See Kytasty, *Some Aspects of Ukrainian Music under the Soviets*, text in Russian (New York: Research Program of the U.S.S.R., 1954), 35.

<sup>48</sup> ‘O nagrazhdenii Ukrainskogo gosudarstvennogo kiyevskogo teatra operi i baleta’, *Izvestiya*, 23 March 1936, 1.

was reserved for four figures in the field of opera: three went to the opera singers Ivan Patorzhinsky, Mikhail Donets, and Mariya Litvinenko-Volhemut. The fourth to receive the top award was Ukraine's cultural commissar Andrey Khvylya, who had overseen dekada preparations. Fourteen others received the lower rank of Badge of Honour, but two were deemed important enough to be photographed with the top prize winners. They were the young soprano Oksana Petrusenko and the composer of the updated Ukrainian operas Volodymyr Yorysh (see Figure 1.2).<sup>49</sup> The announcement was certainly the first time that musicians and music affairs had featured so heavily on *Pravda's* front page. Established Russian composers found the awards nothing short of a scandal, which was demonstrated in June when the dekada productions toured to Leningrad's Kirov Theatre.<sup>50</sup> Shortly afterwards, an NKVD informant reported an overheard discussion of Leningrad musicians who deemed the dekada awards grossly disproportionate. The conductor Samuil Samosud complained that 'now in general they are praising and rewarding *natsionali* [non-Russians]', while the opera singer Mikhail Rostovstev complained that 'they'll give medals to Armenians, Georgians, Ukrainians – everyone except Russians'.<sup>51</sup> However, some Ukrainians believed quite the opposite to be true. During a police interrogation in October 1937, the former head of the opera house Ivan Yanovsky admitted that Mikhail Donets had dismissed the dekada awards as a 'mockery'. Donets had apparently continued:

Look, how many employees of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and how many of the Ukrainian Theatre have been awarded[?] They threw these awards at us like a charitable handout. Our merits are great, but so few [of us] are awarded. All this is because we are mere Ukrainians.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 1.2.** Ukrainian dekada award recipients on the front page of *Pravda*.

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<sup>49</sup> *Pravda*, 24 March 1936, 1.

<sup>50</sup> See Yelena Grosheva, *Ivan Sergeevich Patorzhinskiy* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1976), 70.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168, translation adjusted (citing TsGAIPD 24/2/1839, 272–73). Fitzpatrick notes that the informant seemed sympathetic with the Leningrad musicians.

<sup>52</sup> HDA SBU 6/44240-fp, 67. In one of Yanovsky's earlier confessions, he recalled Donets using more colourful language: that the Ukrainians had had 'mud slung in their faces' and had their 'lips smeared with lard and thrown a piece of bread like a hungry dog'. *Ibid.*, 16.



Source: *Pravda* (24 March 1936, 1). From left to right: Khvylya, Litvinenko-Volhemut, Donets, Patorzhinsky, Yorysh, and Petrusenko.

After the final concert, a grand reception was held in the Kremlin in honour of the Ukrainians. Most involved in the *dekada* were invited, as well as various prestigious figures from Moscow's art scene, though the NKVD apparently screened all attendees, and a handful of the Ukrainians deemed to be a security risk were barred.<sup>53</sup> To some embarrassment, Khvylya himself was refused entry, even though he was supposed to give a speech. Only a last-minute intervention from Karl Pauker, an NKVD agent and Stalin's personal bodyguard, meant that the Ukrainian cultural commissar could attend.<sup>54</sup> Stalin sat at the head table accompanied by Molotov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Khrushchev, and the Ukrainian prize-winners. Yorysh recalled being introduced to Stalin, Voroshilov and Kaganovich, and was struck by the openness of the discussion: 'The conversation was unforced. Comrade Stalin occasionally interrupted comrade Voroshilov about our performances. To speak with musical terminology, the conversation had a large and varied score'.<sup>55</sup>

Amongst the speakers was Ukraine's leader Panas Lyubchenko, who in startling terms affirmed his nation's unwavering commitment to Soviet identity in the face of perceived conspiracies from its Western neighbours:

Comrades, you know that the German fascists and Polish gentry made their first and most important objective to seize Soviet Ukraine. According to the long-defeated Petliurists,<sup>56</sup> who now skulk about the restaurants and brothels of Warsaw and Berlin, they think the German fascists and Polish masters can easily take our country. We declare here in the

<sup>53</sup> See Kytasty, *Some Aspects of Ukrainian Music Under the Soviets*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Vladimir Nevezhin, *Zastol'ya Iosifa Stalina: Bol'shiye kremlevskiye priyemii* (Moscow: Noviy khronograf, 2011), 218. Citing N. S. Churenev, *Komendantii Kremlya v labirintakh vlasti* (Moscow: Veche, 2005), 477–78.

<sup>55</sup> Yorysh, 'Chudova podorozh', in A. Torchynsky (ed), *Dekada ukrainskoho mistetstva v Moskvi 1936 roku* (Kharkiv: Mistetstvo, n.d.), 100.

<sup>56</sup> Symon Petliura was a Ukrainian politician who led the fight against the Bolsheviks in the Civil War. When Ukraine fell to the Soviets in 1920, he fled to Poland. He was assassinated in Paris in 1926.

face of the leaders of our party and government, in the face of Comrade Stalin: Soviet Ukraine, which has created a collective farm system, raised its industry to heights that squalid Poland could hardly compare (voices: 'bravo', 'hurray'), Soviet Ukraine, which is strengthening the ranks of its glorious, invincible Red Army, will crush to dust anyone who dares encroach upon its borders. (storm of applause, warm applause in honour of the party leaders and government).<sup>57</sup>

Lyubchenko's keenness to shore up anti-Polish sentiments may stem from the fact that forces within his government were already conspiring towards his removal. In a matter of months, both he and Khvylya were themselves accused of bourgeois nationalism, 'Polish connections', and conspiring to turn Ukraine into a fascist state, to which I will return below.

But while some were fighting for survival, Kerzhentsev could bask in the success. The first to speak at the reception, he lamented how in Tsarist times Ukrainian troupes had been driven to Moscow's most decrepit theatres, but 'now when Ukrainian artists arrive in socialist Moscow, Moscow provides them with the best theatre premises in the Union, they are received by the leaders of the party and government in the Great Hall of the Kremlin Palace'.<sup>58</sup> Even during the dekada itself, Kerzhentsev lost no time in capitalizing on the situation for furthering his agenda for operatic reform. The day before the festival began, Kerzhentsev arranged a public debate about opera, involving members from the Ukrainian opera company, the Composers' Union, and the heads of all of Moscow's theatres. Closing the debate, Kerzhentsev bemoaned the unsatisfactory state of Soviet opera, admonishing composers for failing to write operas on contemporary themes. Asserting his authority, he vowed that the KDI 'will continue to help and survey the work of librettists, composers and theatres' and that 'composers must fully apply themselves to rectify the artistic questions raised by the articles in *Pravda*'.<sup>59</sup> Four days later (the same day Stalin saw *Natalka-Poltavka*) he called another public meeting, this time on the subject of formalism in art more broadly. Here, Kerzhentsev complained that artistic disciplines other than music had failed to address *Pravda's* anti-formalist

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<sup>57</sup> RGALI 962/21/69, 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> 'Soveshchaniye o sovetskoy opere', *Pravda*, 11 March 1936, 6.



campaign, and that musical organizations in the republics (especially Ukraine) had failed to subject the campaign to debate.<sup>60</sup>

In an article entitled 'The Outcomes of the Ukrainian Dekada', Kerzhentsev waxed lyrical about the success of the festival. As far as Kerzhentsev was concerned, all three operas presented by the Ukrainians were prime examples of socialist realism, due to their 'melodiousness, depth of feeling, sincerity, and simplicity of form', noting that 'formalists could learn a thing or two here about how to write high-quality works'. Recanting on his 1920s opinion that opera was an unsalvageable bourgeois relic, he admitted that the dekada had shown that there was such a thing as legitimate 'pomp and ceremony' (*pishnost*). This was so long as it was adopted within the sphere of Soviet festive life, 'with strictness and simplicity like the parades on Red Square or the First of May Demonstrations'. This righteous *pishnost*, Kerzhentsev claimed, was distinguishable from the bourgeois variety he had previously derided. The Ukrainians had found an 'operatic archetype' where 'genuine beauty is absolutely alien to the sugary "mercantile" or "imperial" *pishnost*' that has been the pitfall of so many contemporary productions'.<sup>61</sup>

And so Kerzhentsev signed off his *volte-face*; opera had been transformed from 'bourgeois pastime to revolutionary ritual', to use Philip Ross Bullock's phrase describing the changing cultural attitude to the genre entering the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker has shown that Kerzhentsev's reimagining of the operatic genre through the lens of his 'collective creativity' ultimately produced 'a Stalinist twist on Lunacharsky's vision' for opera in Soviet society.<sup>63</sup> However, the works the Ukrainians had shown were hardly representative of recent Ukrainian operas, nor were they met with the unreserved fanfare that Kerzhentsev implied.

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<sup>60</sup> 'Soveshchaniye v Komitete po delam iskusstv', *Pravda*, 15 March 1936, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Kerzhentsev, 'Itogi ukrainskoy dekadī', *Pravda*, 22 March 1936, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Philip Ross Bullock, 'Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006), 83–101

<sup>63</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'Opera and Obsolescence in the Russian Culture Wars', *The Opera Quarterly*, 25/1–2 (2009), 84.

## Towards a Soviet Ukrainian Opera

Regarding the candidacy for the first dekada, Ukraine was the evident front-runner. Of all Soviet republics, Ukraine had the most long-standing opera tradition, with established companies in Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, and Kharkiv, most of which had been active since the nineteenth century. After the Revolution, Kyiv boasted an avant-garde music scene at least as active as Moscow or Leningrad. Unlike in Russia, music had been less affected by anti-modernist organisations such as RAPM (The Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians), whose Ukrainian branch APMU was founded in 1928, five years after its Russian counterpart.<sup>64</sup> 1928 was a watershed year, marking the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan, which paved the way to Ukraine's collectivization and mass starvation. It also marked the beginning of the Ukrainization policies, which sought to transform Soviet society. With reform came the familiar clampdown on the 'bourgeois nationalist' intelligentsia and 'formalism', as authorities played catch-up to establish the politically regimented cultural life that was well-established in Russia.<sup>65</sup> Yet these years saw no shortage of Ukrainian operas, such as Borys Yanovsky's *Explosion* (1927), based on revolutionary themes, and the same composer's folksong-saturated opera *Duma of the Black Sea* (1929). Later came Vasily Zolotaryov's *Khves'ko Andiber* (1929), Valentin Kostenko's *Karmelyuk* (1930), and Lyatoshinsky's *The Golden Hoop* (1930). In 1934, when Ukraine's capital was relocated from Kharkiv to Kyiv, the national opera followed. Many of the staff were relocated to the new capital and the theatre was given a major renovation. The Ukrainian Politburo supervised the overhaul of the opera house, even directly intervening to help source a stage curtain modelled on that of Moscow's Bolshoi theatre.<sup>66</sup>

These Ukrainian operas of the late 1920s, however, were mostly too steeped in the modernist sounds of the avant-garde to withstand scrutiny in Moscow after the *Lady*

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<sup>64</sup> See Dagmara Turchyn-Duvirak, 'Kyiv, the 1920s, and Modernism in Music', Irena Makaryk and Virlana Tkacz (eds), *Modernism in Kyiv: Jubilant Experimentation* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2010), 322–41.

<sup>65</sup> Myroslav Shkandrij, 'Politics and the Ukrainian Avant-garde', in *ibid.*, 224, 227.

<sup>66</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, 'The Making of a "Proletarian Capital": Patterns of Stalinist Policy in Kyiv in the Mid-1930s', *Europe-Asia Studies* 50/7 (1998), 1240.

*Macbeth* affair. Lyatoshinsky's *Golden Hoop* is a case in point. The work depicted a promising national topic: the clash between Ukrainians and Mongol invaders in the thirteenth century, interpolating plenty of Ukrainian folksongs into its score. But notwithstanding the neofolklorism and patriotic tropes, its modernist pretensions would have ensured a firm rejection from Moscow censors. Lyatoshinsky championed developments in European opera, having been a leading campaigner for a Ukrainian premiere of Berg's *Wozzeck* in Kyiv.<sup>67</sup> While the folkloristic premise of Lyatoshinsky's opera was feasibly less objectionable than that of *Lady Macbeth*, the chromaticism of the score was 'formalist' to its core. The prelude, for instance, opens with a canon where each entry sketches a rising chromatic scale, underscored by a pandiatonic harmonic palette of parallel major triads (Example 1.1). Though it evaded serious criticism in 1936, the work did not escape scrutiny during the 1948 Zhdanovshchina. The Stalin-Prize-winning composer Andry Shtoharenko publicly complained that Lyatoshinsky's early works had emptied Ukrainian folksongs 'of all content of ideas and destroyed their naturalness and simplicity'. For Shtoharenko, *The Golden Hoop* was the worst offender of this trend, being 'without tunefulness and expressiveness' and 'almost unsingable' in its vocal lines.<sup>68</sup>

**Example 1.1.** Lyatoshinsky, *Zoloty obruch* (The Golden Hoop), prelude.

**Sostenuto e maestoso**

*ff e marcatissimo*

*ff*

*marcato*

<sup>67</sup> Virko Baley, 'Zoloty obruch', *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Stanley Sadie (ed.), 4 vols (London: Macmillan, 1992), IV: 1242–43.

<sup>68</sup> 'Perviy vsesoyuzniy s"yezd sovetskikh kompozitorov: Sodokladi predstaviteley soyuznikh respublik', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 24 April 1948, 3.

Naturally, the official account presented at the dekada expunged this recent avant-garde trend. A history of Ukrainian opera was published in *Pravda* by Ukraine's cultural commissar, Andrey Khvylya. Khvylya was effectively the Ukrainian Kerzhentsev, and they shared similar career trajectories. Khvylya had joined the Communist Party in 1918 and, like his Russian colleague and many early revolutionaries, adopted a revolutionary pseudonym (his real surname was Oliner, Kerzhentsev's was Lebedev). Like Kerzhentsev, he had pursued journalism before working his way up the ranks of senior government. Khvylya's opera article focused largely on the nineteenth century. He complained how opera had been 'stifled by the tsarist bureaucracy', pointing to an 1876 decree from Tsar Alexander II banning the publication of books, plays, and musical scores in the Ukrainian language. After the Revolution, Khvylya portrayed Ukrainian opera as

caught in a war of extremes. 'Ukrainian nationalists' had 'viewed the creation of Ukrainian opera as a campaign against everything Russian', while 'great-power chauvinists [...] tried to oppose the creation of Ukrainian opera' altogether. Khvylya named only three post-revolutionary works: two operas *The Unknown Soldier* (1934) by Filipp Kozitsky and *Tragic Night* (1935) by Konstantin Dankevich, and the ballet *The Merchant from Tuscany* (1936, rev. 1965) by Vladimir Nakhabin.<sup>69</sup> Yet even these three works were hardly tenable for the dekada. *The Merchant from Tuscany* was based on a fourteenth-century novella by Giovanni Boccaccio. Though its music was inoffensive, the ballet was formulated around twenty authentic Italian folk melodies.<sup>70</sup> As such, it could hardly have been touted as a credible celebration of Ukrainian national identity. Kozitsky's *Unknown Soldier* offered a promisingly revolutionary libretto about a French soldier sent to Ukraine to help suppress the Revolution, ultimately joining the Red Army and fulfilling his 'international proletarian duty'. But the composer never managed to have the full work staged, succeeding only in concert performances of a few individual arias and choruses.<sup>71</sup> Dankevich's *Tragic Night* depicts the construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station in a score saturated with Ukrainian folksong, yet this work had been tarnished by a crackdown on formalism. In early 1936 a two-day plenum was organized in Odesa to discuss the *Pravda* editorials condemning Shostakovich, and Dankevich was forced to admit that *Tragic Night* contained 'careless passages' and 'some formalism in its production'.<sup>72</sup> A later critic claimed that the work was creatively unconvincing and 'schematic', with poorly written characters.<sup>73</sup> In 1951 Dankevich would face serious rebuke for his later opera *Bogdan Khmel'nitsky* at the first post-war Ukrainian dekada (see Chapter 6).

In a 1940 article, Andrei Olkhovsky<sup>74</sup> exposed a broader crisis in Soviet Ukrainian opera. He complained that schematic approaches and the failure to create 'generalized

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<sup>69</sup> A. Khvylya, 'Ukrainskaya opera', *Pravda*, 9 March 1936, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Galina Tyumeneva, 'Meshchanin iz Toskani' – V. Nakhabina', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/12, 15–23, esp. 16.

<sup>71</sup> Valerian Dovzhenko, 'Ukrainskaya SSR', in Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 303.

<sup>72</sup> É. S., 'Odesskiy oblastnoy soyuz sovetskikh kompozitorov', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/6, 78.

<sup>73</sup> Dovzhenko, 'Ukrainskaya SSR', 303. Dankevich's *Bogdan Khmel'nitsky* received its Moscow premiere at the second Ukrainian dekada in 1951, initiating a major scandal. See Chapter 6.

<sup>74</sup> In 1941 Olkhovsky was taken prisoner by the German army, but his exemplary knowledge of music allowed him to secure the directorship of the music school in the Free University in Munich.

musical-dramatic unity' were indicative of a broader crisis in Ukrainian opera.<sup>75</sup>

Composers were too dependent on the mere 'citation' of folksongs that were 'poorly dramatically united'.<sup>76</sup> Olkhovsky also complained of an unreceptive public, noting that Ukrainian ballets often fared better in Moscow than they did at home.<sup>77</sup> The inaction of the Composers' Unions was a further confounding factor, which had failed to critically evaluate the genre of opera, leaving it a 'private matter' for composers. Meanwhile, the 'passive role' maintained by theatres hardly helped. Olkhovsky lamented that 'of the 20 or more operas written for the operatic repertoire only two have actually survived'.<sup>78</sup>

These two surviving operas were the nineteenth-century heirlooms the Ukrainians had brought to the 1936 dekada: Hulak-Artemovsky's *The Zaporozhian Cossack Beyond the Danube* and Lysenko's *Natalka-Poltavka*. Both were prized national artefacts, though as comic operettas composed in the old-fashioned vaudeville style, they were hardly pioneering works even by the standards of the century in which they were written. *Natalka-Poltavka* was easily interpreted as socialist realist by critics, since it depicted a plucky proletarian hero triumphing over a conniving bourgeois villain. Petro is betrothed to Natalka, but while the former is away working abroad, the wealthy landowner Vozniy persuades Natalka's mother to allow him to marry her daughter instead. Tensions run high upon Petro's return but Vozniy reluctantly honours Natalka's true pledge to Petro. *Cossack Beyond the Danube* pursued a more farcical line. The premise was inspired by real events, namely the terrorization by Russian forces of the Zaporozhian Cossacks in the early eighteenth-century, who were forced to flee 'beyond the Danube' into the neighbouring Ottoman Empire.<sup>79</sup> In the opera, the drunkard Ivan Karas is one such exiled

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He moved to the United States in 1949, where he taught at various universities, eventually finding sympathetic readers for his critical accounts of the 'enslavement' and 'agony' of art under Soviet oppression. See Olkhovsky, *Music Under the Soviets: The Agony of an Art* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1955); Olkhovsky, 'History of Ukrainian Music', Volodymyr Kubijovyč, *Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopedia*, 3 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), II: 579–93; obituary, *The Washington Post*, 'City Life' supplement, 17 February 1969, B3

<sup>75</sup> Olkhovskiy, 'Tvorchestvo sovetskikh kompozitorov Ukraini', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1940/7, 8

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>79</sup> *Zaporozhian* in Ukrainian derives from *za porohamy* ('beyond the [Dnieper] rapids'), referring to the region of southern Ukraine on the Dnieper River where the Zaporozhians lived, adding to the title's wordplay.

Cossack, who becomes the unlikely hero when he flees his home to escape his pestering wife and encounters the Turkish Sultan, who is travelling through his land incognito. The Sultan invites Karas back to the palace and, heartened by Karas's story, grants the Zaporozhians their repatriation, who joyfully cross the Danube back into Ukraine.

Richard Taruskin has claimed that *Cossack Beyond the Danube* 'in no sense' expresses Ukrainian nationalism.<sup>80</sup> Despite the opera's patriotic Ukrainian premise, Hulak-Artemovsky was indeed heavily Russianized, spending most of his career in Saint Petersburg. Even critics at the 1863 premiere failed to detect anything especially Ukrainian in the score. One complained that the 'content of the opera is poor in terms of drama and characters, and there is almost nothing of an authentic portrayal of Zaporozhian life',<sup>81</sup> while another observed that Artemovsky's strong Italian influence 'like an unwelcome guest, paralyses all folk character'.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the work made a strong impression in Saint Petersburg, and Taruskin has suggested that it may have served as inspiration for Musorgsky's *Sorochintsy Fair*.<sup>83</sup>

*Cossack Beyond the Danube* and *Natalka-Poltavka* were deemed to require a serious overhaul to pass muster with a 1930s audience. The writer Maksym Rylsky was given the task of preparing new Ukrainian translations of the Russian librettos, but even he felt the need to justify the revival of a work like *Natalka*:

Why is the Kyiv Opera Theatre dragging from the dust of time this 'granny [*babusyu*] of Ukrainian theatre', which has lived on stage for over a hundred years, when given the opportunity to provide shining examples of [more contemporary] great masters[?]'<sup>84</sup>

Trying to answer his seemingly rhetorical question, Rylsky suggested that such works represented 'the best [...] of Ukrainian pre-revolutionary theatre' but were 'poorly

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'Zaporozhets za Dunayem', *The Grove Dictionary of Opera*, IV: 1209. Taruskin made similar claims for other early Ukrainian operas. In a 1999 piece for the *New York Times*, he suggested that there is little of Ukraine in Bortnyansky's operas. The angry response of many Ukrainian readers is testament to the fact that many Ukrainians still sense national colouring in such music. See Taruskin, *On Russian Music* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009), Chapter 2, 'For Ukraine: He's a Native Son, Regardless', 53–57.

<sup>81</sup> Zagrebelniy, *Sovremennoye slovo*, 19 April 1863. Quoted in Leonid Kaufman, S. S. *Gulak-Artemovsky: Zhizn', lichnost', tvorchestvo* (Moscow: Muzika, 1973), 109.

<sup>82</sup> M. Rappaport, *Sin otechestva*, 19 April 1863, quoted in *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 339–40. Fittingly, the heavily revised version of *Cossack* prepared by Yorysh for the dekada included a quotation from *Sorochintsy Fair*. Konstantin Kuznetsov, 'Muzika sovetskoy Ukraini: Ukrainskaya opera v Moskve', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/5, 77.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in N. F. Kagarlitskiy, *Oksana Petrusenko*, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), 204.

conceived for the large opera house'.<sup>85</sup> The task of sprucing them up musically was given to Volodymyr Yorysh, who had graduated from the music school in Yekatorinoslav in 1924, where he subsequently taught for four years. He held various conducting positions, eventually becoming the principal conductor of the Kyiv Opera House, immediately after the relocation of the Ukrainian capital from Kharkiv in 1934. Yorysh rescored the opera for a larger orchestra and added new numbers, aiming, in his own words 'to restore and complete the outdated operas, and create a national musical spectacle'.<sup>86</sup>

Yorysh took great liberties with Hulak-Artemovsky's score. Read in terms of Olkhovsky's categorisation of Ukrainian opera, it seems that Yorysh was trying to transfer these works from the 'domestic theatre' category to that of 'Wagnerian-type music drama'.<sup>87</sup> Yorysh's reworking of the overture from *Cossack Beyond the Danube* provides a case in point, transforming Hulak-Artemovsky's modest 32-bar overture into an extended potpourri of tunes from the opera.<sup>88</sup> Yorysh also extended some of Hulak-Artemovsky's clipped musical gestures into more extended and rounded phrases. The extent of the reworking went so far as to compose an entirely new third and penultimate act.<sup>89</sup> But if the revision of *Cossack* was drastic, it was nothing compared with the new version of Lysenko's *Natalka-Poltavka*, which was edited almost beyond recognition. Of the 47 numbers in Yorysh's version of the opera, only about eight or nine were Lysenko's, and even those that remained were heavily edited.<sup>90</sup> While in *Cossack Beyond the Danube*

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>86</sup> Volodymyr Yorysh, 'Nash repertuar', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 11 March 1936, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Olkhovskiy, 'Tvorchestvo sovetskikh kompozitorov Ukraini', 7. Olkhovsky complained that contemporary Ukrainian operas dogmatically aligned themselves within three clichéd archetypes: the Wagner-type music drama, the kuchka-style pastiche, or domestic theatre.

<sup>88</sup> Yorysh's full revision is now lost, but his reworked overture survives in an arrangement for wind orchestra. *Vstup do operi 'Zaporozhets' za dunayem' dlya dukhvogo orkestru* (Kyiv: Mistetstvo, 1941). A flavour of Yorysh's version can also be gleaned from a highly abridged film version of the opera produced in 1936, directed by Ivan Kavaleridze. See <<https://youtu.be/pHOCTtDveZw>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>89</sup> A new third act for *A Cossack Beyond the Danube* had been composed by Stanislav Lyudkevich, entitled 'Karas in the Courtyard of the Sultan' in 1934–35 based on a libretto by R. Kupchinsky. If Yorysh got the idea for a third act from Lyudkevich it seems that he composed his own from scratch. On Lyudkevich's act, see 'Notografiya muzichnikh tvoriv Stanislava Lyudkevicha za 1897–1938 roki', *Stanislav Lyudkevich Memorial Museum Website*, <<http://ludkevych.in.ua/notografiya-muzichnih-tvoriv-stanislava-lyudkevicha-za-1897-1939-roki/>> (accessed 9 August 2022). Both Yorysh (in interview with Konstantin Kuznetsov) and Andrei Khvylya confirmed that the third act performed at the dekada was Yorysh's. See Khvylya, 'Chto mi pokazhem Moskve', *Pravda*, 11 March 1936, 1; Kuznetsov, 'Muzika sovetskoy Ukraini: Ukrainskaya opera v Moskve', 77.

<sup>90</sup> Kuznetsov, 'Muzika sovetskoy Ukraini: Ukrainskaya opera v Moskve', 78–79.



Yorysh had drawn freely from a palette of Ukrainian folksongs, in *Natalka* he was less fastidious, inserting Russian folk tunes and even old religious songs. The libretto was also drastically expanded to include a host of new characters.<sup>91</sup> But Yorysh worked in the spirit of Kerzhentsev's collective creativity, apparently taking pains to work with individual singers to develop his characters musically.<sup>92</sup>

Even Ukrainian critics had doubts about the new productions. Abram Gozenpud (later a greatly respected authority on Russian and Soviet opera) wrote in a 1935 editorial that the new production of *Cossack* was musically 'weak and primitive'.<sup>93</sup> The new *Natalka* had its Kyiv premiere two weeks before the dekada and was met with lukewarm reviews in the Ukrainian press.<sup>94</sup> Critics in Moscow were only tentatively accepting of the bid to turn Hulak-Artemovsky's modest musical comedy into a pseudo-Wagnerian epic. Viktor Gorodinsky's *Pravda* review concluded that 'despite some overly laboured sections and a few unsuccessful details, as a whole Yorysh's work should be recognized as one of mastery in its musical qualities'. Yet he qualified this by noting that neither *Cossack* nor *Natalka* constituted 'the cornerstone of Ukrainian musical-vocal culture' but were rather 'young shoots and early branches' sprouting from 'rich and fertile soil'.<sup>95</sup> Yevgeny Braudo, whilst otherwise complimentary, noted that the new third act was musically 'generally pleasant [...] but delivered with such pomp as to produce a completely false impression in the overall development of the performance'.<sup>96</sup> The reviewer for *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* admired collective aspects of the production, noting that the opera had 'evolved gradually' and was the work of 'a number of musicians from different generations'. But this reviewer

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>92</sup> *Komsomol'ska Pravda*, 28 February 1936. Quoted in Kagarlitskiy, *Petrusenko*, 205.

<sup>93</sup> Gozenpud, 'Muzikal'naya zhizn' v Kiyeve', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1935/2, 96.

<sup>94</sup> For a summary of reviews, see Kagarlitskiy, *Petrusenko*, 211.

<sup>95</sup> Viktor Gorodinskiy, 'Natalka-Poltavka', *Pravda*, 16 March 1936, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Braudo, 'Dva spektaklya', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 15 March 1936, 5. In another review, Braudo was unreservedly complimentary about Yorysh's work: 'The Soviet-Ukrainian composer Yorysh (conductor of the Kyiv opera) was commissioned to enrich *Cossack Beyond the Danube* with several additional numbers based on artistically elaborated Ukrainian songs. The composer Yorysh handled this task excellently. The entirety of his overture has been worked out with great care, with an excellent understanding of the details of Ukrainian folksong'. Braudo, 'Spektakli ukrainskoy operi', *Rabochaya Moskva*, 14 March 1936, 4.

similarly admitted that Yorysh's reworkings were prone to 'somewhat difficult and overcomplicated musical figurations'.<sup>97</sup>

Konstantin Kuznetsov provided the most sympathetic assessment. He insisted that Yorysh's revision was continuing a tradition of merging multiple authorial voices that had been with *Cossack* from its conception. Kuznetsov noted that the opera had been 'the result not only of Artemovsky's own creativity, but also of people "around him"', such as the composer's wife and musicians who assisted with the orchestration.<sup>98</sup> For Kuznetsov, 'genuine creative participation' was to thank for creating 'an absolutely exceptional success with the audience'.<sup>99</sup> What most impressed about Yorysh was his ability to synthesize folksong not just as 'inert ethnographic material, but as the impulse towards its independent, spirited and living development'.<sup>100</sup> Kuznetsov suggested that Ukrainian opera presented an 'independent variant' of Dzerzhinsky's *Quiet Don*, which Stalin himself had lauded as a model for socialist realist opera just weeks earlier.

Despite the willingness of some critics to furnish Yorysh's versions with qualified praise, these works had clearly missed the mark. It was the 'collective creativity' itself that lay at the heart of the problem. If, to recall the aphorism attributed to British engineer Alec Issigonis that 'a camel is a horse designed by a committee',<sup>101</sup> an operatic camel was exactly what Yorysh had produced. The patchwork of collective voices was a theoretical triumph, but a practical disaster that even confused sympathetic critics. Nevertheless, they had been the only viable works the Ukrainians could produce, and they served their purpose enough for official accounts to brush the criticism aside. Both *Natalka-Poltavka* and *Cossack Beyond the Danube* continue to be highly celebrated and frequently staged in Ukraine, holding a similar status of founding national operas as Glinka's operas do in Russia. But Yorysh's updated versions were soon dropped from the repertoire and derided by later commentators. Echoing his 1935 review a quarter of a century later,

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<sup>97</sup> Semyon Korev, 'Narodnost' i kul'tura: O spektaklyakh kiyevskogo gos. akademicheskogo teatra operi', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 17 March 1936, 3.

<sup>98</sup> Kuznetsov, 'Muzika sovetskoy Ukraini: Ukrainskaya opera v Moskve', 76–77.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>101</sup> See 'Alec Issigonis', Elizabeth Knowles (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, eighth ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Gozenpud claimed that the dekada works were successful ‘despite the shortcomings of Yorysh’s musical editions’.<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Hulak-Artemovsky’s Soviet biographer suggests Yorysh ‘overloaded the sound and broke the lightness and elegance of the comic opera’.<sup>103</sup> Yorysh’s entry in the 1993 *Encyclopaedia of Ukraine* dismisses them as ‘unsuccessful and unstylish remakes’.<sup>104</sup>

In an article published after the dekada, Yorysh personally acknowledged the flaws in his work. The critics had:

particularly noted the positive aspects of my work and at the same time rightly pointed out my mistakes. I completely agree that the third act of *Cossack Beyond the Danube* falls out of the general rhythm and style of the performance. It is ineffective, undynamic, and largely resorts to ballet divertissement.<sup>105</sup>

If a positive case can be made for Yorysh’s versions, it is that they set a precedent for other revisions, somewhat like the adaptations of Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov* by Rimsky-Korsakov, Shostakovich, and Rathaus, which were favoured by many opera houses prior to the 1970s. Even in the post-Soviet era, both works are considered founding national operas. The National Opera of Ukraine have recently instituted ‘updated’ versions of both *Natalka-Poltavka* (2012) and *Cossack Beyond the Danube* (2015) composed by Myroslav Skoryk (1938–2020).<sup>106</sup> Skoryk similarly turned Artemovsky’s modest overture to *Cossack* into an extended medley, though his attempts to smooth out the creases of Hulak-Artemovsky’s writing are often less drastic than Yorysh’s.<sup>107</sup> If not his actual music, perhaps in this respect Yorysh’s legacy at least remains at the opera house at which he used to conduct.

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<sup>102</sup> Gozenpud, *Russkiy sovetskiy operniy teatr (1917–1941): Ocherk istorii* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1963), 419

<sup>103</sup> Kaufman, *Gulak-Artemovsky*, 141.

<sup>104</sup> Danylo Struk and Volodymyr Kubijovyč (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Ukraine*, 5 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), V: 775.

<sup>105</sup> Volodymyr Yorysh, ‘Chudova podorozh’, 99–101.

<sup>106</sup> ‘Natsional’naya opera predstavit novuyu versiyu *Zaporozhetsa za Dunayem*’ *Segodnya*, 26 February 2015. <<https://kiev.segodnya.ua/kiev/kwheretogo/nacionalnaya-opera-predstavit-novuyu-versiyu-zaporozhca-za-dunaem-595472.html>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>107</sup> For a complete performance of Skoryk’s version of *Zaporozhian Cossack*, see <[https://youtu.be/Qh5C7O4uC\\_c](https://youtu.be/Qh5C7O4uC_c)> (accessed 9 August 2022).

## Musical Uproar in Kyiv

At the dekada's reception, Kliment Voroshilov, a fellow Ukrainian, had issued a warning to Ukrainian artists. While the dekada had impressed Moscow, Ukraine should not become complacent. Ukrainian art was 'still far, far from reaching the top' and 'hard work' would be required.<sup>108</sup> Voroshilov's warning was perhaps well-advised, since a wave of purges arrived in Ukraine the following year that had seismic effects on cultural life. At the heart of the purge was a trumped-up fascist conspiracy, whose main ringleaders included Khvylya and Lyubchenko. According to the Ukrainian press, they had sought to establish ties with Germany and Poland, hoping to 'destroy the Soviet government in the USSR and establish a fascist dictatorship'.<sup>109</sup> Most of the government were soon implicated in this conspiracy (purportedly led by Lyubchenko and Khvylya), and about three quarters of Ukraine's Central Committee had been purged by January 1938. Arrests in the general population also soared: in 1937, nearly 160,000 people were charged by the NKVD, compared with around 16,000 the previous year.<sup>110</sup> Lyubchenko, who had spurned 'squalid Poland' in his dekada speech, was now accused of treason and harbouring Polish connections. He and his wife were shot in their home in 1937.<sup>111</sup> He was replaced by Stalin's future successor Nikita Khrushchev, who on the eve of his acceptance promised to 'mercilessly smash the spies and traitors'. In cultural matters he couched the Stalinist line that 'we Bolsheviks develop the national culture of each nation, [in a manner that is] "national in form and socialist in content."<sup>112</sup> Khvylya, the dekada's organizer, had been accused of nationalist counter-revolutionary activities just months after the festival. While he initially fended off the charges, he was re-arrested in August 1937 and confessed to

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<sup>108</sup> RGALI 962/21/69, 9.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Hrihory Kostyuk, *Stalinist Rule in the Ukraine: A Study in the Decade of Mass Terror (1929–39)* (Munich: Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1960), 111.

<sup>110</sup> Iouri Šapoval, 'La lejovschina en Ukraine (1936–1938)', *Vingtième Siècle* 107 (2010), 46.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, rev. ed. (London: Pimlico, 2008 [1968]), 227–32.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine*, 189, translation adjusted.

being a ringleader in the fascist conspiracy.<sup>113</sup> He was sentenced and shot the following February.<sup>114</sup>

Paranoid conspiracies about Ukraine's cultural institutions began appearing in *Pravda* throughout 1937. The radio stations were supposedly controlled by an 'enemy organization' who had heretically played funeral marches after the announced sentencing of figures like Lyubchenko. The education system and museums were supposedly overrun by nationalists and anti-Russian spies.<sup>115</sup> Khvylya was accused of hard-line nationalism in his promotion of the Ukrainian language, by manipulating Russian-Ukrainian dictionaries and substituting words that were too similar to Russian with 'enemy nonsense'.<sup>116</sup> On 12 September the director of the Kyiv Opera Theatre Ivan Yanovsky was arrested as a Fascist ringleader. He had received the Badge of Honour at the dekada, where he had boasted of overseeing the 'defeat of nationalist counter-revolutionaries operating in the theatre, who littered it with hostile elements and brought it to artistic and material ruin'.<sup>117</sup> But now he found himself on the wrong side of the battle against nationalism, and he cut an oddly junior figure amongst the purported ringleaders, being the only listed conspirator who was not a senior member of government.<sup>118</sup>

The arresting NKVD officer confiscated Yanovsky's Badge of Honour on the day of his arrest.<sup>119</sup> Transcripts of his confessions are preserved in his NKVD file.<sup>120</sup> In his final interrogation, he admitted to being a member of a 'Ukrainian counter-revolutionary nationalist organization', into which he claimed to have formerly been recruited five months before the dekada. His growing 'nationalist sentiments' had coincided with his 'gradual political rapprochement with Khvylya' beginning in 1933.<sup>121</sup> Khvylya had helped him obtain the directorship of the Kharkiv Opera House in 1933, but had insisted that

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<sup>113</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 231.

<sup>114</sup> See 'Khvilya-Olinter, Andrey Anan'yevich', in *Memorial: Spiski zhertv politicheskikh repressiy*, online database <<https://base.memo.ru/person/show/3078075>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>115</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, 232.

<sup>116</sup> D. Vadimov, 'Russko-ukrainskiy slovar' i yego sostaviteli', *Pravda*, 29 December 1937, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Yanovskiy, 'Desyat' let', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 11 March 1936, 1.

<sup>118</sup> For the list of ringleaders, see Kostiuk, *Stalinist Rule in the Ukraine*, 112.

<sup>119</sup> HDA SBU 6/44240-fp, 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* The file contains confessions given on four separate days: 19 September (ll. 14–28), 20 September (ll. 37–56), 22 September (ll. 29–36), and 1 October (ll. 57–72). All are handwritten except the last, which is typewritten with Yanovsky's signature at the foot of each page.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

Yanovsky only stage Ukrainian works rather than Western-European operas, an order that had apparently come direct from Lyubchenko. It was Khvylya who had suggested Hulak-Artemovsky's *Cossack Beyond the Danube* be staged in a revised version, and Yorysh was immediately appointed for this purpose. However, Yanovsky apparently soon heard that many workers in the theatre were indignant that this work was being staged, and he received a call from a *Komsomolskaya pravda* journalist who accused Yanovsky of planning a 'production that reeks of nationalism'. Yanovsky reported this to Khvylya, who dismissed it all as 'Russification Great-Power sentiments'.<sup>122</sup>

When the capital was transferred to Kyiv in 1934, it was Khvylya who immediately secured Yanovsky the directorship of the opera house in the new capital, insisting that all matters relating to the reorganizing of the opera house should be reported only to himself, excluding all other Party organizations.<sup>123</sup> Yanovsky confessed that a co-ordinated effort to pollute the theatre with 'nationalist elements' began from then on. Khvylya was actively protecting nationalists in the theatre and becoming ever more radical, expressing the need to 'fight against the persecution of Ukrainians in an organized way', and that Ukraine was being 'deprived of rights' and 'subsumed' by Moscow. On the issue that the opera house was being assigned insufficient funds from Moscow, Khvylya had insisted that 'Ukraine must become more independent such that it can solve its problems alone'.<sup>124</sup> Yanovsky was meanwhile beginning to actively recruit members into the counter-revolutionary conspiracy. One of these was apparently the stage director Vladimir Manzy, who had been awarded at the dekada. According to Yanovsky, Manzy had visited the Prague Opera House with Yorysh in early 1936, and returned complaining of the comparative miserly salaries and poor rights of theatre workers under the Soviet system. Yanovsky claimed to have recruited Manzy into the counter-revolutionary conspiracy despite a suspicion that Manzy was already under investigation by the NKVD.<sup>125</sup> Yanovsky also had his sights on Mikhail Donets, claiming to have had many 'anti-Soviet' conversations with

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 35–36.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 59–61, 40.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 64.

the opera singer. Donets had complained that the 'arrests of Trotskyites had been made incorrectly' and lamented that this view could not be discussed openly.<sup>126</sup> Yanovsky also accused Donets of embezzling funds from the opera house to build himself a lavish home in Kyiv, intimidating other musicians in the theatre to perform for free at his behest, and punching a theatre worker in the face in 1933.<sup>127</sup>

When dekada preparations began, everyone was left with little time for nationalist conspiring:

In October [1935], it became known that the theatre was going to Moscow and intensive training began. I was in the theatre for whole days and nights. [...] In January, the Department of Arts was established. When I visited Khvylya, he was always surrounded by throngs of people. Khvylya came to the theatre for rehearsals of *Natalka-Poltavka*, but since there were many controversial issues about the performance itself, Khvylya was constantly harangued by actors and I seldom spoke with him personally. When I visited him about the Moscow trip, he told me that it was necessary to show Moscow what Ukrainians are capable of.<sup>128</sup>

Yanovsky had a negative opinion of Yorysh: 'a man of changing moods; today he could say one thing, tomorrow another, he could shout and swear in the corridors or even in the street.'<sup>129</sup> Khvylya, however, had apparently had a much more favourable view of him, as

Yanovsky related:

During my professional relations with Yorysh, he repeatedly said 'if you won't settle with me, I'll go to Khvylya', and so it went. If Yorysh went to or called Khvylya, Khvylya would call and instruct me to fulfil Yorysh's requirements. Khvylya's tireless support of Yorysh leads me to believe that they were conspiring in nationalist work.<sup>130</sup>

When the delegation returned to Kyiv, Yanovsky recalled an outbreak of squabbling over the dekada awards. Various workers including the soprano Zoia Haidai had submitted letters of resignation, while Donets had 'sulked about the theatre cursing as to why he had received a lesser award than Patorzhinsky'. The conductor Ariy Pazovsky (who had conducted the dekada production of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snegurochka*) was offended that he had only received the Badge of Honour.<sup>131</sup> When Khvylya heard of this, he purportedly replied: 'let them go, this is everyone who came from Russia. They're not ours'.<sup>132</sup> Khvylya dismissed the loss of Pazovsky, claiming that Yorysh was more than up

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 44. Pazovsky would go on to an illustrious career at the Bolshoi in Moscow.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 44. Yanovsky noted to Khvylya that Haidai was Ukrainian.

to the task, and that he would appoint Peter Herman Adler to replace Pazovsky, a young Czech conductor currently working in Kyiv, who would go on to a stellar career in America. Yanovsky complained that the theatre would deteriorate under the batons of Yorysh and Adler, but Khvylya purportedly answered 'we have already achieved our goal in Moscow, and now we can gradually weaken the work in the theatre. This issue has been agreed with Lyubchenko'.<sup>133</sup>

Yanovsky was sentenced on 25 October 1937 and shot the following day. Meanwhile, the Kyiv Opera House was becoming embroiled in a public scandal surrounding the company's first post-dekada project: Lysenko's *Taras Bulba* (1890), based on Gogol's novella of the same name. The revised *Taras* was already in preparation at the time of the dekada and was completed by the autumn of 1936. The new libretto was again the work of Rylsky, with music not by Yorysh but Levko Revutsky (who composed new scenes and an expanded overture) and Lyatoshinsky who reworked the orchestration.<sup>134</sup> In his NKVD confession, Yanovsky recalled that Khvylya had wanted Yorysh to prepare the new version of *Taras*, but was forced to back down after 'everyone understood that Yorysh would do this to a very poor standard', and he was forced to back down on the insistence of senior figures in the theatre.<sup>135</sup> Revutsky had been Lysenko's piano student before studying composition with Glière at the Kyiv Conservatoire. He had contributed an *Ode to Stalin* on a text by Rylsky that was performed at the 1936 dekada (discussed in Chapter 2).<sup>136</sup> Following the official success of the dekada, the revised *Taras* was highly anticipated. *Pravda* published an extended feature on Lysenko ('the founder of Ukrainian music') to commemorate the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the composer's birth, and ran frequent reports charting Revutsky and Lyatoshinsky's progress.<sup>137</sup>

But the tide abruptly changed when a *Lady Macbeth*-style attack by the partisan musicologist Georgy Khubov, entitled 'An Anti-People Spectacle', appeared in *Pravda* four days after Yanovsky was executed. Khubov began by outlining systemic problems in the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>134</sup> Valerian Dovzhenko, 'Ukrainskaya SSR', 316.

<sup>135</sup> HDA SBU 6/44240-fp, 53.

<sup>136</sup> Volodimir Panchenko, *Maksim Ril's'kiy* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2019), 19.

<sup>137</sup> A. Belokopitov, 'Osnovnopolozhnik ukrainskoy muziki', *Pravda*, 22 March 1937. See also 17 March 1937, 6; 8 April 1937, 3.



Kyiv Opera company. The newly appointed conductor Vladimir Dranishnikov and *Taras Bulba*'s artistic director Iosef Lapitsky were singled out for their lack of 'creative initiative'. Worse still, the theatre management demonstrated severe disorganization and 'complete apathy'. To illustrate the incompetence, Khubov noted how the theatre's planned performance of Dzerzhinsky's new opera *Virgin Soil Upturned* was little more than a month away, but that they had only just taken the trouble to acquire a final version of the score. Criticisms kept coming: the theatre had failed to produce anything new, but rather kept cycling through a narrow range of twelve productions, which had led to a loss of public interest. Moreover, the spirit of collective creativity was not fostered by the theatre management. Khubov insisted that 'the leadership does not hold healthy criticism and self-criticism in high esteem', and that artists were forced to work 'without continual and lively creative communication'.<sup>138</sup>

For Khubov, the new *Taras Bulba* represented a 'gross distortion' of both Gogol and Lysenko. Dranishnikov and Lapitsky had transformed the 'simple lyric opera' into a 'fraudulent sham of a performance passed off as "monumental"'. The score itself was not Khubov's primary concern, and he passed over Revutsky's music almost without comment and even praised Lyatoshinsky's 'successful' orchestration. He turned instead to the 'tasteless and anaemic' stage designs, which engendered a 'provincial-decadent "style"' that mirrored the 'defeatist "intention" of Lapitsky's production'.<sup>139</sup> Worst of all were the changes to the libretto, especially the final scene. In Lysenko's original opera, Polish mercenaries are chased away by Cossacks, led by their hero Taras, but the new version completely inverted the ending. Rytsky's ending, which saw Taras burned at the stake while Cossacks fled the Polish aggressors across the Dnieper, was deemed '*in defiance of Gogol, Lysenko, historical truth, and artistic integrity!*'.<sup>140</sup> Khubov aligned the production with the nationalist-fascist conspiracy, asserting that it was 'neither coincidental nor

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<sup>138</sup> Georgiy Khubov, 'Antinarodniy spektakl: Dela kievskoy operi', Pravda, 24 October 1937, 6.

<sup>139</sup> In his confessions, Yanovsky claimed to have warned Khvylya that the stage designer A. G. Petrutsky for a 'formalist', but Khvylya had overruled him. HDA SBU 6/44240-fp, 47.

<sup>140</sup> Khubov, 'Antinarodniy spektakl', 6 (emphasis original).

surprising that the “new” interpretation of Lysenko’s opera was praised and approved by that vile enemy of the people Khvylya and his pathetic henchmen’.<sup>141</sup>

Kyiv’s Composers’ Union soon became implicated in the affair. The June-July edition of their publication *Radyanska muzika* (Soviet Music) had included a host of embarrassing acclaim for the new *Taras*. It included an extensive article by the composer Viktor Kosenko, who suggested that Rylsky’s libretto brought the opera ‘closer to the plot of Gogol’s story and restored the correct facts and character of the era’. Kosenko also praised Revutsky’s music for the revised ending, which ‘harmonized the work as a whole’ and ‘reflected the style of the era depicted in the opera’. In the same issue, the composer Filipp Kozitsky championed an ‘extremely carefully conceived production’ that ‘could not fail to attract the attention of the broad masses’. He further suggested that the new version better reflected actual historical events.<sup>142</sup> The issue was subjected to a scathing assessment in *Sovetskaya muzika*, which accused the editorial board not just of ‘political recklessness’ but also for clandestinely distributing material that was ‘politically harmful, fallacious, and directly contradicting *Pravda*’s directives, introducing confusion [*putanitsu*], muddle [*sumbur*], and bafflement [*sbivaya s tol’ku*] to disorientate the reader’. The publication of the issue of *Radyanska muzika* had been severely delayed and it was only issued to readers at the end of November, over a month after Khubov’s article, which only rendered the praise for the new *Taras Bulba* even more incriminating.<sup>143</sup>

The production was abruptly withdrawn, only to be revived six weeks later. Some minor adjustments had been made, but the ending was unchanged, provoking a backlash from *Pravda*.<sup>144</sup> The next editorial ridiculed the disdain with which the theatre management had treated Khubov’s editorial. A snap meeting of the theatre management following the article’s appearance had apparently been more concerned with rebuttal than reflection, proving Khubov’s point that the leadership could not accept criticism. Returning the offending opera to the stage in a near identical form had apparently been approved by the

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>142</sup> All quoted in A. Kamennogorskaya, ‘Politicheskoye nedomisliye *Radyan’skoy muziki*’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/2, 105–106.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>144</sup> D. Vadimov and T. Lil’chenko, ‘Toptaniye na meste: Yeshchyo raz o polozhenii v kiyevskom opernom teatre’, *Pravda*, 3 January 1938, 4.

Ukrainian Department of Arts Affairs, which was equally implicated. The article also reinforced public disillusionment with cold hard facts: that the theatre was only selling 30–50 percent of its tickets and was burdened by a growing deficit of half a million roubles.<sup>145</sup> While Khubov had merely made the fascist conspirators complicit in approving the opera, Lyubchenko, Khvylya, and now Yanovsky were deemed personally responsible for all the theatre's deficiencies:

For several years, the Bourgeois nationalists and fascist agents Lyubchenko, Khvylya, and the theatre's former director Yanovsky conducted their sabotage of the theatre. They corrupted people, tried to sow disunity amongst the collective, littered the theatre with nationalist rabble, hindered the attraction and promotion of young cadres, and prevented the invitation of major vocal forces from the fraternal republics.<sup>146</sup>

The post-dekada experience had made it abundantly clear to the Ukrainians that socialist realism was not socialist reality. A 1954 memoir of a Ukrainian dekada participant who later emigrated to the United States bitterly threw the artifice into sharp relief:

[the dekadas] of national culture began early in 1936, that is, two years after the mass destruction of the best, most capable and spiritually creative part of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, and just after the extermination by starvation of millions of Ukrainian peasants and workers. Not even the bones of these martyrs had been laid to rest when their relatives were forced to sing and dance in the Kremlin, so themselves confirming [Stalin's aphorism] that 'life has become better, life has become more joyous'. These cultural dekadas were organized on the eve of the blackest reaction, which later gave way to Yezhovshchina [the apex of the Great Terror in 1937, driven by Nikolay Yezhov as head of the NKVD]. All that diabolical policy of the Kremlin had to be covered up somehow, and national art was supported and existed for this purpose.<sup>147</sup>

Such bitterness was surely shared by many Ukrainians, as it was with subsequent generations of Soviet music scholars. The eminent Georgian music scholar Vladimir Donadze, for instance, bestowed the 1937 Georgian dekada with the Pushkinian epithet 'a feast in time of plague'.<sup>148</sup> Some scholars have more recently argued that Soviet celebration was a blunt tool for diverting the population's attention from terror. Karen Petrone suggests that 'Soviet celebrations were not simply "circuses" to divert the population from terror; they supplied the raw materials out of which Soviet cadres constructed their own identities and were also a crucial means of transmitting these

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 4. The low audiences were hardly a recent problem. Even in the early 1930s the national opera company struggled to exceed half capacity (See Yekelchky, 'Making of a "Proletarian Capital"', 1240). To put the deficit in perspective, this was about the cost of the dekada, which by one estimate had received 465,000 roubles in funding from the KDI (RGALI 962/21/12, 21).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>147</sup> Kytasty, *Some Aspects of Ukrainian Music Under the Soviets*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> Vladimir Donadze, 'Klassicheskoye muzikal'noye naslediyе Gruzii', in G. Toradze (ed.), *Istoriya gruzinskoy muziki* (Tbilisi: Georgian Composers' Union, 1998), 113.

identities to others'.<sup>149</sup> Malte Rolf likewise asserts that the culture of extreme criticism of the terror years 'ultimately brought forth unanimity in praise of the "cheerful celebration" in a "happy country"'.<sup>150</sup> The purges were, after all, as public an affair as the dekadas themselves, each competing for public attention. After the Georgian dekada, one evaluative report even explicitly complained that the press had been so concerned with discussing the trials of Trotskyites that coverage of the dekada had suffered.<sup>151</sup> Far from attempting to conceal purges from public knowledge, reviled counter-revolutionaries became objects of celebration discourse, since their removal was an evident precondition for the improvement of public life.

Whilst earlier scholarship on Soviet music has suggested that the Terror held little sway over musical life, the situation in Ukraine seems to support recent studies have begun to reveal the contrary.<sup>152</sup> Certainly, the purges had a highly destabilizing effect on cultural life. In Georgia, for instance, 3,500 public figures were arrested within the space of a few months in 1937, and over the ensuing two years over 4,000 promotions were made to replace those higher up.<sup>153</sup> High profile dekada figures like Yanovsky were also arrested. Another high-profile example was the respected conductor Yevgeny Mikeladze, who was highly acclaimed at the Georgian dekada. He was arrested a few months later and submitted to over a month of torture. Various incriminating confessions like Yanovsky's were extorted from him: engaging in anti-Soviet activities, wilful sabotage of the Tbilisi Opera House, and conspiring with his influential father-in-law Mamiya Orakhalishvili.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 204

<sup>150</sup> Malte Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917–1991*, Cynthia Klohr (trans.) (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

<sup>151</sup> RGALI 962/21/35, 32.

<sup>152</sup> See, for instance, Inna Klause, 'Composers in the Gulag: A Preliminary Survey', in *Russian Music Since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery*, Marina Frolova-Walker and Patrick Zuk (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 188–217.

<sup>153</sup> Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 226.

<sup>154</sup> For a detailed report of Mikeladze's arrest, drawing on archival documents, see Tamaz Suladze, 'Rekviyem dlya demona s orkestrom', <<https://litbozrenie.com/2015/09/tamaz-suladze-rekviem-dlya-demona-s-orkestrom/>> (accessed 9 August 2022). The only biography of Mikeladze makes only highly cryptic references to the circumstances of his death, for example, that the conductor's personal archive had 'disappeared' due to 'certain circumstances'. G. Taktakishvili, *Yevgeniy Mikeladze* (Moscow: Muzika, 1973), 3.

Isabelle Kaplan has noted that only one dekada (dedicated to Azerbaijan) occurred in the two-year period spanning mid-1937 and mid-1939, and speculates that this lacuna was driven by the purging of cultural elites in the republics.<sup>155</sup> Certainly, the disruptive effect of the purges cast shockwaves in the musical life of the republics. However, a successful dekada as a minimum required the functioning of an opera house and its connected musical institutions, most of whose operations largely withstood the effects of the purges. Those affected usually constituted bureaucrats like Yanovsky and Khvylya, who proved easily replaceable and hardly disturbed the everyday running of the theatre.<sup>156</sup> An equally plausible explanation for the hiatus is that by mid-1937 most of the republics with the ready means of mounting dekadas in Moscow had already done so. In 1936, only Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia had national works in their repertoire, and Uzbekistan proved an unusual case in being prepared to scramble a dekada together in a mere nine months (see Chapter 3). While a flurry of composers was rapidly dispatched to Central Asia in 1936, it would take several years to develop a menu of national repertoire, while their counterparts in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe were slow in drawing up a canon of Soviet-style national repertoire.<sup>157</sup> Most other republics were inclined to take more time over preparations. Plans generally unfolded over several years, often hampered along the way by creative and bureaucratic obstacles, and it was not unusual for a dekada to be delayed for more than a year beyond the time originally scheduled. The purges, then, represented just one more obstacle in a time-consuming and gruelling process.

Leonid Maksimenkov has called the 1936 campaign against formalism in the arts 'an explosion in the temple after a careless game of pyrotechnics'. In short, the campaign was not a carefully choreographed cultural policy bestowed from on high, but rather a chaotically and randomly executed series of events that unwittingly prompted a cultural revolution.<sup>158</sup> The evidence gathered in this chapter supports this reading. Broadly, the

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<sup>155</sup> Kaplan, 'Comrades in Arts: The Soviet Dekada of National Art and the Friendship of Peoples', *Journal of Russian History* 19/1 (2020), 83.

<sup>156</sup> A similar purging of an opera house director occurred in Belorussia in 1938, when Fyodor Yarikov was dramatically replaced with Oskar Gantman. See Chapter 5 for more details.

<sup>157</sup> The main exception might have been Armenia, who in 1936 already had two of its four dekada productions in its repertoire (Spendiaryan's *Almast* and Tigranyan's *Anush*). See Chapter 4.

<sup>158</sup> Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki*, 3.

Ukrainian dekada constituted a rapid and somewhat chaotic attempt to reconfigure dated nineteenth-century repertoire around Soviet ideals, both aesthetic and ideological, while at the same time negating the avant-gardist inclination of recent Ukrainian opera. Due to the dekada's extraordinary public profile, the decision-making process was overseen by high-level political actors as much as it was by musicians. Finally, I have argued for a more complex understanding of the relationship between terror and celebration. Celebration was not a smokescreen to divert public attention from the Terror. Rather, both celebration and terror were bound up in a narrative that promised the dialectical 'progress' of Soviet society. After all, so far as Bolsheviks were concerned, the quashing of anti-Soviet 'fascists' was as much a matter for celebration as was the blossoming of national heterogeneity in the arts. In the following chapter we shall see that the dekadas as an institution would weather its chaotic milieu, achieving a cemented status in Soviet culture by 1937.

## Chapter 2 – Stalin Cult, Dekada Cult: Kazakhstan and Georgia

### Music and ‘Professionalization’ in Kazakhstan

Central Asia had posed the greatest challenge to the Soviet nation-building project. It was not until 1936 that the Central Asian republics – the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics – were granted the national status they would hold throughout the Soviet era. Until 1925, much of the region covering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and southern Kazakhstan still comprised the former tsarist province of Turkestan. Ethnic identities were weakly defined and certainly not geographically specific, since nomadism was widespread even by the turn of the century. In the 1920s, Soviet ethnographers studied the area extensively, and began to establish national boundaries, though territorial distinction was often arbitrary and contested by the local populace.<sup>1</sup>

While the nation-building project in Central Asia was broadly complete by the mid-1930s, the newly formed nations had to be furnished with cultural identities, and so Stalin’s affirmative cultural policy of ‘patronage’ (as discussed in the Introduction) came to the fore. Young graduate composers from Moscow and Leningrad (who almost exclusively graduated between 1931 and 1936) were increasingly sent to peripheral regions to assist with the project of cultural modernization. In one sense, the Soviet mission for professionalization as a conduit for eliminating the ‘backwardness’ (*otstalost*) of culture in Central Asia came from a place of imperial condescension. However, it may also be argued that these practices were bound up in Soviet cultural policy more generally, driven by the Soviet reverence for ‘progress’ (*razvitiye*), itself a product of a Marxist teleological conception of history. It is worth noting, for instance, that prior to collectivization the Bolsheviks had deemed Russia itself to be ‘backward’. Similarly, Simo Mikkonen has shown that professionalization was as much an aim of the Russian music profession in

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<sup>1</sup> See Francine Hirsch, ‘Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities’, *The Russian Review* 59/2 (2000), 201–26.

the 1930s, noting that the establishment of the Composers' Union led to a rapid increase in the number of full-time composers by the end of the decade.<sup>2</sup>

The urge to promote European-style art in Kazakhstan began in the 1920s, driven by the resolve of an established cultural intelligentsia to shape Kazakh art along Western lines. Levon Mirzoyan, Kazakhstan's cultural commissar appointed in the 1920s, fought to establish drama theatres, arts schools, a national opera theatre, and a concert hall.<sup>3</sup> In 1932 a Kazakh Music and Drama College was opened, headed by the Leningrad-trained Kazakh composer Akhmet Zhubanov (1906–1968), which by its second year had enrolled 130 students.<sup>4</sup> Zhubanov devised a curriculum that balanced the study of Western and traditional Kazakh music, though in 1951 he was reprimanded for his bourgeois nationalism, 'idealizing Kazakhstan's feudal past', and celebrating nomadism, which was supposed to have been supplanted by collectivization.<sup>5</sup> Zhubanov had graduated from the Leningrad Conservatoire in 1932, where he had crossed paths with the Russian composer Yevgeny Brusilovsky (1905–1981). Brusilovsky had initially begun his studies at the Moscow Conservatoire in 1922, but dropped out due to a long illness. He entered the Leningrad Conservatoire in 1926, studying composition with Maximilian Steinberg, Rimsky-Korsakov's son-in-law and Shostakovich's teacher.<sup>6</sup> Through connections in the Leningrad Composers' Union, Zhubanov invited Brusilovsky to Kazakhstan, where he worked for many decades, writing the first Kazakh operas and symphonies, heading the Kazakh Composers' Union, and training a generation of Kazakh composers.

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<sup>2</sup> Simo Mikkonen, *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 369.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Rouland, 'Music and the Making of the Kazakh Nation, 1920–1936' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 2005), 315. Mirzoyan's influence was publicly acknowledged during the Kazakh dekada by Temirbek Zhurgenev, the chairman of the Kazakh Committee on Arts Affairs. See Zhurgenev, 'Iskusstvo sovetskogo Kazakhstana', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 23 May 1936, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Rouland, 'Music and the Making of the Kazakh Nation', 348–49. On developments in the 1930s, see also Boris Yerkovich, *Muzikal'naya kul'tura soyuznikh respublik: Kazakhskaya SSR*, second ed. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1957), 30–32.

<sup>5</sup> 'Vikorchevat' do kontsa ostatki burzhanogo natsionalizma', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1951/12, 32–40, esp. 33.

<sup>6</sup> Anatoliy Kel'berg, *Ye. G. Brusilovskiy* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1959), 6–7. For another biographical sketch, see V. Messman, 'Yevgeniy Brusilovskiy', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1946/11, 35–36. For the composer's autobiography, transcribed from notebooks found in archives in Kazakhstan, see Brusilovskiy, 'Pyat' tetradey', *Prostor*, 1997/9, 50–75 (part i) and 1997/10, 86–113 (part ii).



Steinberg taught by Rimsky-Korsakov's maxims, and depicting the cultures of the Caucasus or Central Asia inevitably meant drawing on kuchkist tropes of musical orientalism. Previous scholarship has suggested that the oriental works of Rimsky-Korsakov and other Russian nineteenth-century composers were concerned less with the active or authentic promotion of Eastern culture than with the generic aestheticizing of the 'exotic' other.<sup>7</sup> However, Adalyat Issiyeva has compellingly argued that Rimsky-Korsakov's attitude to the East was informed by a liberal worldview that sought to 'demystify the oriental world'.<sup>8</sup> Following the influence of his teacher, Steinberg himself appropriated 'oriental' influences in his works, and at the time of Brusilovsky's emigration he was exploring Kazakh and Kyrgyz themes in his Fourth Symphony ('Turksib', 1933). Later, Steinberg would turn to Armenian and Uzbek themes in his orchestral 'capriccio' *V Armenii (In Armenia)*, 1940 and his Fifth Symphony, a 'symphonic-rhapsody' on Uzbek melodies (1942). His treatment of national material was somewhat static, perhaps reminiscent of Glinka's 'changing background' technique. Steinberg stressed the importance of 'quoting melodies without the slightest change or development [...] even in large forms, right up to the symphony, I consider this method of "quoting" [*tsitirovaniye*] quite possible'.<sup>9</sup> Brusilovsky applied such techniques in his *dekada* works (discussed below), but thereafter commentators observed more nuanced approaches, especially in his first full-grown Kazakh opera *Yer Targin* (1937).<sup>10</sup>

Of course, later Soviet commentators connected the influence of Brusilovsky's Rimskian roots in the 'Petersburg School' with his national Kazakh works.<sup>11</sup> Brusilovsky paid due respect to his kuchkist forebears, but Rimsky-Korsakov had never visited the orient he had sought to capture in music, and Brusilovsky set himself apart by virtue of his

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald Abraham, 'Arab Melodies in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin', *Music & Letters* 56/3–4 (1975), 313–18; Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), Chapter 9.

<sup>8</sup> Issiyeva, 'Rimsky-Korsakov and his Orient', in Marina Frolova-Walker (ed.), *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 145–69.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in S. L. Grinzburg, *Puti razvitiya uzbekskoy muziki* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1946), 104–05.

<sup>10</sup> See A. Livshits, 'Kazakhskiy muzikal'niy teatr', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/7, 65. One of his composition students recalled that Brusilovsky used to say that 'the folk tune is like cast iron, like stone, it is difficult to work with'. Bakir Bayanov, 'Vo mne spontanno prodolzhayetsya tvorcheskiy protsess', *Muzikal'naya akademiya* 1999/4, 72.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Kel'berg, *Brusilovskiy*, 7; Yevgeniy Trembovelsky, 'Plodotvorniy sintez', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1971/2, 29.

professed authentic engagement with Kazakh music. In an interview during the Kazakh dekada he remarked: 'I shall not attempt to deny the direct connection between my symphonic music and the work of Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin. These composers, *for their time*, it can be said, caught the essence of Asia'. Further qualifying his remarks, he added, 'I am quite sceptical about those composers, even outstanding ones, who begin arranging the music of a nationality which he [sic] knows but little'.<sup>12</sup>

According to one memoir, the commission to write the first Kazakh opera came in June 1934, when Brusilovsky was introduced to the Kazakh Commissar for Enlightenment Temirbek Zhurgenev at an event in Alma-Ata. Zhurgenev, suggested an opera on the Kazakh story *Kiz-Zhibek* (The Silk Maiden).<sup>13</sup> The work was planned to bolster the repertoire of the new Kazakh State Theatre, which had been established five months earlier. Brusilovsky accepted the commission and was given a mere thirty days to complete the music. After spending two weeks assembling musical materials from existing folksong collections (mostly Aleksandr Zatayevich's *500 Kazakh Folksongs*)<sup>14</sup> he stayed with husband-and-wife musicians Kanabek Bayseitov and Kulyash Bayseitova, collaboratively refining the opera for a further two months.<sup>15</sup> Brusilovsky's weak grasp of Kazakh culture was apparently of little concern. Zhurgenev remarked privately of the composer that 'it is true that he doesn't speak the language, but I do not think this is important'. A Russian-language libretto was prepared to help Brusilovsky interpret the text musically.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the welcome, Brusilovsky can only have felt disheartened by musical life in Alma-Ata, after the thriving heartland of Leningrad. In 1934, the national music theatre's 'orchestra' comprised just eleven musicians, only one of whom was professionally trained. These musicians also often proved erratic, as Brusilovsky recalled: 'none of these

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<sup>12</sup> Brusilovsky, 'Composer Tells of Work on Kazakh Music', *Moscow Daily News*, 21 May 1936, 3, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> The exchange is documented in the memoir of the Kazakh opera singer Kanabek Bayseitov, and summarized in Rouland, 'Making the Kazakh Nation', 330–31.

<sup>14</sup> Brusilovsky, 'Composer Tells', 3. Zatayevich was a prolific Kazakh folksong collector.

<sup>15</sup> Bayseitov, *Na vsyu zhizn'*, 131 (cited in Rouland, 'Making the Kazakh Nation', 331).

<sup>16</sup> From the memoir of Kurmanbek Dzhandarbekov, a singer who participated in the dekada, quoted in Gaukhar Nurtleuova, 'Operniy pevets Kazakhstana', *Vox populi*, 30 May 2013, <<https://voxpathuli.kz/1140-opernyy-pevets-kazakhstana/>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

musicians could be criticized since the offended musician would immediately submit a letter of resignation', yet it was impossible to dismiss anyone since there were no alternative candidates. There was no guarantee that the musicians could even cope with orchestral solos, or even that they would turn up for work.<sup>17</sup> Brusilovsky's own working conditions were also a far cry from the comfort of Leningrad. Years later, he told the musicologist Viktor Vinogradov that *Kiz-Zhibek* had been written in a freezing room by the light of a dim kerosene lamp.<sup>18</sup>

The premise for the music drama was a classic fairy tale, realizations of which had been the staple of Kazakh theatres since the late nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Brusilovsky's music drama (on a libretto by Gabit Musirepov) opens with Zhibek rejecting the marriage proposal of Batyr Bekezhan, insisting that she will only marry her true love Tulegen. Tulegen hastens to his father's kingdom to ask for his parents' blessing. He gains the approval of his mother (against his father's wishes) but is murdered by Bekezhan on the return journey. Guilt-ridden, Bekezhan is cursed and banished after confessing his crime to Zhibek. Musically, *Kiz-Zhibek* emulated Steinberg's method of free and extensive folksong quotation. Perhaps the most prominent of these themes is the 'Gak-ku' theme, which appears leitmotivically throughout the work, signifying the title character (Example 2.1). The 1934 Alma-Ata premiere was prepared in time to feature amongst the celebrations for the anniversary of the October Revolution, with the Bayseitovs in the principal roles of Zhibek and Tulegen. According to Brusilovsky's memoir, the audience response was tepid, and the premiere was all but ignored in the press.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brusilovskiy, 'Pyat' tetradey', i: 71.

<sup>18</sup> Vinogradov, 'Mualim', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1979/4, 40.

<sup>19</sup> See B. Yerzakovich, *Muzikal'noye naslediyе kazakhskogo naroda* (Alma Ata: Nauka, 1979), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Brusilovskiy, 'Pyat' tetradey', i: 65, 69.



Soviet policy of liberating 'oppressed' Muslim woman. The music drama opens with Zhalbır and his brother Elemes at a wedding, where the latter falls in love with Khadisha, hearing her sing about the injustice of Kazakh women being sold into loveless marriages. Tsarist enforcers arrive to announce the policy of forced conscription, and they capture Khadisha, cutting off her hair for her liberal views. Zhalbır leads a rebellion against the tsarist cronies, destroying the conscription records and freeing Khadisha, but Elemes is fatally wounded in the onslaught. As Khadisha dies of a broken heart, the masses pledge their allegiance to Zhalbır's revolutionary cause.<sup>26</sup>

Richard Taruskin has argued that Brusilovsky called on the symbolic nationalist/orientalist language of Balakirev and his contemporaries (adopting features such as the Dorian mode and modal harmonies more broadly) to establish broader signification of otherness where the 'artefacts of the indigenous tradition' would not easily be read by a Russian audience.<sup>27</sup> Brusilovsky's recourse to nineteenth-century musical clichés could as much have been self-deception as a conscious resolve to conflate baseless oriental signifiers with authentic Kazakhness. After all, a composer raised on Steinberg's kuchkist diet would naturally perceive Kazakh music through Rimskian ears, and so he sought similar compositional solutions when adapting it to European principles, solutions he would abandon in later works.

Even in his dekada works, Brusilovsky occasionally adapts kuchkist signifiers to explore more daring chromatic terrain, especially at moments of heightened dramatic tension. In *Zhalbır*, the folksong 'Elimay' (About My Homeland) acts as a leitmotif for the title character. The theme had become a kind of unofficial Kazakh national anthem, before Brusilovsky would collaboratively compose an official one in 1945.<sup>28</sup> In the rousing choral version of the theme in act 4, Brusilovsky uses many of the nineteenth-century harmonic features that Taruskin identifies, most notably the major subdominant chords that form a

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<sup>26</sup> Summarized in Zhubanov (ed.), *Ocherki*, 48–49.

<sup>27</sup> Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 271–73.

<sup>28</sup> On 'Elimay' as leitmotif, see Brusilovskiy, 'Muzıka Kız-Zhibek i Zhalbira', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 23 May 1936. The Kazakh national anthem was composed in 1945 by Brusilovsky, Latif Khamidi, and Mukhtan Tulebayev.

strident modified plagal cadence in the closing bars (see Example 2.2). While the melody is ostensibly minor, its span of a fifth (from degrees  $\hat{1}$  to  $\hat{5}$ ) lends it modal and diatonic subjectivity. The coexistence of F-sharps and F-naturals with E-naturals and E-flats evince the ambiguous modal and diatonic roles of  $\hat{7}$  and the ‘unstable sixth degree’ associated with the ‘Russian minor’ (Dorian mode), both identified by Taruskin. Incidentally, the lucid modal harmonies were also a mark of practicality. Brusilovsky’s singers had little or no operatic training, and materials were selected to suit the strengths and abilities of individuals.<sup>29</sup> The weak vocal abilities of the Kazakh chorus confined most choruses to a single unison line. Brusilovsky’s lack of facility in polyphonic writing would become widely recognized by commentators on his music, though it was seldom deemed a deficiency. At the dekada, the lack of vocal harmony in the choruses was not perceived to be problematic, one reviewer noting that ‘lack of polyphony [in the choruses] is more than compensated for by the enormous internal dynamics of melodic development’.<sup>30</sup>

**Example 2.2.** Brusilovsky, *Zhalbir*, act 4, chorus.

49 **Coro**

Ne na-vist' raz - duy v po\_zhar! Ro - di - na ne plach! So - kru-shi - tel' - niy u - dar

55

pri-met vrag pa - lach, pri-met vrag pa - lach!

i i<sup>7</sup> IV<sup>4</sup> iv<sup>4</sup> i #vii VI V

iv i IV #vii<sup>4</sup> i IV i IV i

Raging fire of hatred! The homeland does not cry!  
The enemy executioner will deal the crushing blow!

<sup>29</sup> Brusilovskiy, ‘Pyat’ tetradey’, i: 67.

<sup>30</sup> Semyon Korev, ‘Kiz-Zhibek’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 23 May 1936, 2. In his Kazakh operas composed after the dekada, Brusilovsky began to introduce more complex choral polyphony. See Messman, ‘Yevgeniy Brusilovskiy’, 36.

Failures in vocal technique were often overlooked by critics as national idiosyncrasies or even intentional dramatic features. The singer Kurmanbek Dzhandarbekov would later recall that when he performed one of Bekezhan's arias at a performance attended by Stalin, his voice failed on a high note and only a hoarse exclamation came out. Dzhandarbekov was reprimanded by his superiors for the embarrassing failure, which was soon forgotten when a review praised Bekezhan's laughter as an outstanding piece of stage direction.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, the Kazakh government officially acknowledged such weaknesses, conceding in September 1936 that the dekada had exposed weak professional abilities, also lamenting that no dekada production had been based on a contemporary Soviet premise.<sup>32</sup> Vocal deficiencies were often charitably overlooked by critics, especially with the Central Asian republics. Deficiencies in singing and acting became a point of contention at the hurriedly prepared Uzbek dekada the following year (see Chapter 3). Writing in 1982, Sayra Kiizbayeva, the star of the 1939 Kyrgyz dekada, recalled that she had been unhappy with her dekada performances, which she thought had been overrated by the press.<sup>33</sup> In a meeting before the Tajik dekada in 1941, the composer Sergei Balasanyan was grilled by critics about a rogue B-flat in one of his operas. When pressed, the composer agreed to make the change, but flippantly observed that the singer to whom it was assigned hit a different note with each performance.<sup>34</sup>

Unperturbed by the challenges, Brusilovsky became the first of many Russian composers of his generation to build their careers in Central Asia. He succeeded an older generation of missionary composers (Steinberg, Reinhold Glière, Sergey Vasilenko, and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov) that was giving way to another: Viktor Uspensky, Nikolay Mironov, and Yelena Romanovskaya in Uzbekistan; Vladimir Vlasov and Vladimir Feré in Kyrgyzstan; Sergei Balasanyan and Aleksandr Lensky in Tajikistan; and Adrian

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<sup>31</sup> Nurtleuova, 'Operniy pevets Kazakhstana'.

<sup>32</sup> The resolution 'On the Results of the Dekada of Kazakh Art' is summarized in N. Koltochnik (ed.), *Istoriya kazakhskoy SSR: Épokha sotsializma* (Alma-Ata: Nauka, 1967), 482.

<sup>33</sup> Sayra Kiizbayeva, 'Vzlyot, kotoriy mi vsyo chuvstvovali...', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1982/12, 82.

<sup>34</sup> RGALI 962/21/44, 65, 75.

Shapotnikov in Turkmenistan. It is, of course, tempting to view such missionary work through the lens of cultural imperialism, an extension of the nineteenth-century view famously expressed by Dostoyevsky that cast Asia as a legitimate site of imperial Russian conquest.<sup>35</sup> While the practice certainly had colonial impetus, a purely imperialist reading runs the risks of overstressing the totalizing role of Russian hegemony in colonial interactions. The attitudes of visiting composers such as Brusilovsky demonstrated a genuine incentive to engage actively with local musicians in transcultural dialogue, even when projects rested uneasily in the European classical tradition. The musicologist Viktor Vinogradov, who carried out extensive research in Central Asia and knew many of the visiting Russian composers personally, addressed this issue in a 1979 article. He rejected the commonly used Russian term 'invited specialist', preferring 'mualim', the term of respect given to them in Central-Asian languages, meaning teacher, mentor, or knowledgeable/respected person.<sup>36</sup> According to Vinogradov, the mualims:

showed genuine comradely sensitivity, did everything in their power to satisfy the requests of their national colleagues, helped young people to understand the unusual complexities of professional music, and supported and educated the curious and the talented. [...] a generalized image of the mualim looms in my mind: a person who is sincerely devoted to the art of the fraternal peoples and ready to make and endure many sacrifices and hardships as a result.<sup>37</sup>

The image Vinogradov casts is hardly one of Russians out to assert their cultural hegemony over the East. It rather seems to support Rouland's assertion that Soviet Kazakh music 'represented a complex blending of national and super-national elements of Soviet *realpolitik*' that successfully 'established a cultural base through which to promote Kazak[h] national identity'.<sup>38</sup> Without doubt, there were those who resented Brusilovsky's arrival; yet the extent of his influence in shaping Kazakh music is undeniable. He taught an ensuing generation of Kazakh composers, and his music continues to be celebrated as

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<sup>35</sup> For a critique, see David Schimelpenninck van der Oye *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Vinogradov, 'Mualim'. One Kazakh musicologist similarly dubbed Brusilovsky 'Aksakal', from the Kazakh word meaning elder or figurehead. See B. Yezakovich, 'Aksakal kazakhskoy muziki: stranitsi tvorcheskoy biografii Ye. G. Brusilovskogo', in L. Izmaylov (ed.), *Kompozitori Kazakhstana: Sbornik ocherkov* (Alma-Ata: Oner, 1982), 21–42.

<sup>37</sup> Vinogradov, 'Mualim', 39.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Rouland, 'Music and the 1936 Festival of Kazak Arts', in Neil Edmunds (ed.) *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and the Sickle* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 199–200.



a model of Kazakh national music. *Kiz-Zhibek* has never left the repertoire. Many of the retired dekada performers attended the Abay Opera House on 27 January 1958 to celebrate its 1000<sup>th</sup> performance, and it averaged about ten performances a year in the two decades that followed this landmark.<sup>39</sup> In 2017, the opera saw a major revival in a new edition prepared by composer-conductor Abzal Muzhitdinov, nearly double the length of Brusilovsky’s final 1981 version.<sup>40</sup> The high-budget extravaganza is testament to the extent to which Kazakh culture continues to pay homage to its formative Soviet years.

## The Kazakh Dekada

**Box 2.1.** Principal productions of the Kazakh dekada, 17–23 May 1936.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
17, 19*, 21	Yevgeny Brusilovsky, <i>Kiz-Zhibek</i> [The Silk Maiden] (1934, rev. 1981)	Music drama
18, 20, 22*	Yevgeny Brusilovsky, <i>Zhalbır</i> (1935, rev. 1938, 1946)	Music drama
23*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

Plans for the Kazakh dekada were taking shape by February 1936 when dress rehearsals for *Kiz-Zhibek* and *Zhalbır* were arranged for party officials in Alma-Ata.<sup>41</sup> Their decisions were evidently those of a cultural intelligentsia trying to strike a balance between purifying Kazakh works from European forms whilst paying due regard to socialist realist tropes. After viewing *Zhalbır*, they surprisingly suggested further emphasizing Russia’s menacing nature (‘more frightened women at the sight of Russian soldiers’, ‘more serious Russian officials’, but ‘to delete the mention of the cowardice of the Kazakh people’).<sup>42</sup> *Kiz-Zhibek*

<sup>39</sup> Yerzakovich, ‘Aksakal’, 30. *Kiz-Zhibek* had reached 1200 performances by the end of the 1970s. Vinogradov, ‘Mualim’, 42.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of the 2017 production, see S. K. Musakhodzhayeva, ‘Kollektivnoye avtorskovo v kazakhstoy opere’, 110ff. The full production may be seen here: <<https://youtu.be/2EUUu-naVmE>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Rouland, ‘Making the Kazakh Nation’, 365–66. (Citing Arkhiv prezidenta respubliki Kazakhstana [hereafter APRK] 141/1/10682a). As with the Ukrainian dekada, some sources suggest that preparations began in 1935. See, for instance, Ramazan Sulemenov, *Temirbek Zhurgenev* (Alma-Ata: Kazakhstan, 1968), 94–95.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 366 (citing APRK 141/1/10682a, 5–6).

fell far short of expectations, and officials stressed the need for more crowd scenes, better acting, better costumes, and even to cut all 'dances in the European classical tradition'.<sup>43</sup>

Kazakh officials also kept in regular contact with Moscow. The culture commissar Temirbek Zhurgenev wrote to the KDI with an itemized budget, claiming that the festival would require a subsidy of 300,000 roubles from Moscow, the majority for performers (95,000 roubles) and sets/costumes (89,000 roubles) for *Kiz-Zhibek* and *Zhalbır*. The total anticipated expenditure came to 380,000 roubles, but Zhurgenev forecast that 90,000 could be recouped in ticket sales, assuming a revenue of 6,000 roubles per performance.<sup>44</sup> He also appealed to the KDI to help provide suitable venues and accommodation, materials for making sets and costumes for the two operas, paper for printing posters, librettos, and programmes, as well as a writer to assist with translations.<sup>45</sup> But Zhurgenev was drastically overestimating the Committee's resources. The appeal was passed up the chain of command, and officials reluctantly granted 250,000 roubles, but insisted that the Kazakhs find the rest themselves. The KDI also requested additional funds to pay for two of their staff to go to Kazakhstan to oversee preparations, but the reply came that such a trip would have to come from the Committee's budget.<sup>46</sup>

Such attempts to rein in expenditure suggest that confidence in the dekada may not have been so great as the rave press coverage suggested. But such parsimony would not last, and budgets skyrocketed after the Kazakh dekada. While the overall cost of the Kazakh dekada stood at around 350,000 roubles, the following Georgian and Uzbek dekadas came in at 2.5 million and 1.1 million respectively.<sup>47</sup> Soon spending became such that budgets required approval from the Politburo itself, who thought nothing of allocating almost 4.5 million roubles of Sovnarkom funds to the Belorussians in 1939 to assist with dekada preparations, representing most of the dekada's projected 7.3 million costs. The

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 366 (citing APRK 141/1/10682a, 7–8).

<sup>44</sup> RGALI 962/21/38, 19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>47</sup> RGALI 962/21/12, 21.

following year it allocated 2 million roubles towards preparations for the Buryat-Mongolian dekada.<sup>48</sup>

The Kazakhs arrived in Moscow on 10 May, a week before the festival was due to start. As with the Ukrainian dekada before it, press photos show the ceremonial nature of these arrivals, showing the Kazakhs swamped by applauding crowds and journalists scribbling in notebooks (Figure 2.1). These arrivals became highly choreographed affairs; archived plans show that invitations were sent out to officials and prestigious artists across Moscow, whilst welcoming signs were placed on the station platform.<sup>49</sup> The welcome ritual had a lasting effect on many dekada participants. The Azerbaijani opera singer Byul-Byul, already an internationally renowned opera singer by the time of the Azerbaijani dekada in 1938, would recount the visceral experience of arriving at Moscow's Kursk railway station down to the smallest details for many years to come.<sup>50</sup> But even as the Kazakhs arrived in Moscow the productions apparently remained in an unrefined state, and frantic rehearsals continued in Moscow under enormous pressure. Brusilovsky noted in his memoir that 'the first rehearsal began at 9am and ended at 3pm. The second began at 5pm and ended between 9 and 10pm. There were no days off and they rehearsed to the point of complete exhaustion every day'.<sup>51</sup> After long days of rehearsals the participants slept in the auditorium. An apprehensive Zhurgenev, now chairman of the Kazakh Committee on Arts Affairs, kept a close watch on rehearsals, and the exhausting pace began to take its toll on the musicians. On one occasion, nettled orchestral musicians apparently showed Zhurgenev their blistered fingers and asked for a three-day break, to which he purportedly erupted: 'whoever doesn't care about Kazakh art, let him get out!'<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 2.1.** Arrival of the Kazakh delegation at Kazansky railway station (10 May 1936).

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<sup>48</sup> GARF R-5446/23/1829, 26 and RGASPI 17/163/1231, 124 (Belorussia), RGASPI 17/163/1272, 224 (Buryat-Mongolia).

<sup>49</sup> An example of such a plan from the 1939 Kyrgyz dekada may be seen at RGALI 962/21/41, 90.

<sup>50</sup> A. Mamedov, *Byul'-Byul'* (Baku: Azerbaydzhanskoye gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo, 1964), 56.

<sup>51</sup> Brusilovskiy, 'Pyat' tetradey', ii: 93–94.

<sup>52</sup> Bulat Dzhandarbekov, *Uvertyura zhizni* (Almatī: Oner, 2005), 43. Bulat was the son of the opera singer Kurmanbek, who sang at the festival.



Source: *Kazakhstanskaya pravda* (18 May 1936, 1).

While it was hardly in question that incorporating folk art into European art music was necessary to counterbalance the latter's bourgeois tendencies, how effective Brusilovsky had been in reconciling this tension divided opinion. A review in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, for instance, was broadly complimentary towards Brusilovsky's music, though asserted that he had the occasional tendency to 'excessively Europeanize Kazakh musical folklore'.<sup>53</sup> Charges of excessive Europeanism would continue to be levied against Brusilovsky's Kazakh operas by Soviet musicologists in later decades. Abram Gozenpud, for instance, argued of Brusilovsky's early operas that despite 'all the variety of expressive means used by the composer and the desire to remain faithful to Kazakh folklore, the opera was affected by the "oriental" style of European music'.<sup>54</sup>

Suspensions of excessive Europeanization were often levelled against Russian composers working in the republics. In May 1936, a week after the Ukrainian dekada had ended, this issue had been developed at a debate at the Institute of Nationalities. The Institute's director and renowned nationalities expert Semyon Dimanshteyn warned against the single-minded pursuit of Europeanization. Though such an approach offered the 'line of least resistance', for Dimanshteyn European opera ought not have been merely translated into native languages but rather produced once indigenous culture had been 'critically mastered'. Dimanshteyn even insisted that European orchestral instruments should be discouraged, and that efforts should lie instead in improving the

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<sup>53</sup> Osaf Litovskiy, 'Pobedi' kazakhskogo iskusstva', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 30 May 1937, 2.

<sup>54</sup> Gozenpud, *Russkiy sovetskiy operniy teatr*, 373.

sound of native instruments. Another speaker similarly cautioned against the ‘mechanical transplantation of Western musical culture to the East’.<sup>55</sup> Kerzhentsev was not present at the debate but sent his deputy Boyarsky to give the address. However, writing in *Pravda* months later he expressed a more nuanced position. He lamented that in Turkmenistan musicians were apparently being pressured into abandoning national instruments for European orchestral ones. However, he added that those who ‘insist that the zurna is better than the oboe or the kamāncheh is better than the violin’ represented a ‘peculiar musical chauvinism’, which ‘doomed the musical culture of such peoples to backwardness and isolation’.<sup>56</sup> The official line of the Institute of Nationalities was to throw wholehearted support behind the KDI. One speaker declared that it had ‘accomplished more for our republics in four months than Narkompros managed in four years’ and scolded the Writers’ and Composers’ Unions for their lacklustre support.<sup>57</sup>

But despite some anticolonial grumblings, the dekada’s general success was beyond question. For Kerzhentsev, Brusilovsky had ‘done an admirable job of reworking Kazakh melodies for the European orchestra’, and he held him up as an example for young composers.<sup>58</sup> Yet the dekada’s success also saw certain singers shot to previously unimaginable fame. Kulyash Bayseitova, in the role of Zhibek, so impressed authorities that she became the youngest ever People’s Artist of the USSR.<sup>59</sup> In the following months Bayseitova-mania showed no signs of abating. The Russian soprano Valeria Barsova noted that her ‘charming voice is immediately distinguishable amongst hundreds of others’, but that her talent transcended mere national interests (‘the pride not only of Kazakhstan, but all Soviet art’).<sup>60</sup> The dekada brought Bayseitova formidable status and influence. She became one of only three women ever to serve on the Stalin Prize Committee, along with the celebrated soprano of the 1937 Uzbek dekada Khalima

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<sup>55</sup> ‘V gruppe muziki narodov SSSR’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/6, 72–73.

<sup>56</sup> Kerzhentsev, ‘O muzike’, *Pravda*, 4 December 1936, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Speech by Aleksandr Khatskevich, *Revolyutsiya i natsiona’nosti* 1936/7, 62.

<sup>58</sup> Kerzhentsev, ‘Kazakhskoye iskusstvo’, *Pravda*, 24 May 1936, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad*, 269.

<sup>60</sup> Valeriya Barsova, ‘Kul’yash Bayseitova’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 11 September 1936, 2.

Nasirova.<sup>61</sup> In 1949, while speaking at the First World Peace Congress in New York, Shostakovich, in a long defence of Soviet music policy in Asia, singled out Bayseitova as evidence of the success of transnational artistic discourse: ‘All our Soviet land knows and loves [...] the Kazakh songstress Khulyash Beiseitovoy [sic]—whom the people have named [the] “Kazakh nightingale”’.<sup>62</sup>

How far can we take ostensibly anticolonialist narratives at face value? One might conceivably imagine that the pomposity of the occasion was itself a form of imperial legitimation, if not imperial cover-up. Ronald Suny suggests that the Soviet Union remained a Russocentric empire but one ‘disguised and justified by reference to a supranational ideology and a compelling vision of history that sanctioned the rule of the Communist party’.<sup>63</sup> Certainly, the effects of Moscow’s colonial intervention in Kazakhstan should not be underestimated, the most striking example (as with Ukraine) being the terrible effects of collectivization of the early 1930s, which wiped out 40 percent of the Kazakh population either by death or migration.<sup>64</sup> Of course, broadly conceived the dekadas resemble colonialism writ large: small nations paraded before the leader in Moscow, with indigenous culture compelled to present itself within the alien forms of the European classical tradition. But in the minutiae of cultural life many involved were genuinely interested in the mutual interface of cultures, and these vehemently anticolonial narratives invite further analysis.

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<sup>61</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Shostakovich, ‘Formalism vs. Realism in Soviet Art’, in Daniel Gillmor (ed.), *Speaking of Peace: An Edited Report of the Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace* (New York: National Council of the Arts, 1949), 96.

<sup>63</sup> Ronald Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 112.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

## The Georgian Dekada

**Box 2.2.** Principal productions of the Georgian dekada, 5–15 January 1937.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
5*, 6	Zakharía Paliashvili, <i>Daisi</i> [Twilight] (1923)	Opera
7*, 10	Meliton Balanchivadze, <i>Darejan tsbieri</i> [Darejan the Insidious] (1912, rev. 1926, 1937)	Opera
9*, 12, 15	Zakharía Paliashvili, <i>Abesalom i Éteri</i> (1919)	Opera
11*, 12 (matinée), 13	Dolidze, <i>Kéto i Koté</i> (1919)	Operetta
8*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

In January 1937, Georgia mounted the third dekada in Moscow just as the KDI celebrated its first anniversary. By this time, it seems that even the KDI itself was taken aback by the extent of the dekadas' rapid ascent within cultural life. Kerzhentsev noted that the dekadas had already become 'a major political phenomenon' assuring Soviet art 'a broad base for its growth and creative enrichment'.<sup>65</sup> Kerzhentsev's deputy Yakov Boyarsky also took to the pages of *Pravda* to claim that the dekadas had become part of Soviet art's 'everyday life' (*bít*), and that their 'political and cultural impact' had 'far surpassed the expectations of the organisers of these events'. For Boyarsky, the dekadas had become a means 'for resolving the immediate issues in artistic policy and practice', not just in the promotion of folk music and dance but also for appeasing the tension between preserving national traditions and introducing European art culture. The dekadas had made this issue 'the subject of lively debate and a matter of theatrical practice'.<sup>66</sup>

The Georgian dekada matched in scale and financing what it had attained in cultural significance. The budget exceeded either of its predecessors five times over, and it comprised almost as many participants as the Ukrainian and Kazakh festivals combined. With the increasing success of the dekadas, the state music publisher Muzgiz was beginning to publish excerpts of the operas for public consumption. These editions were highly abridged; the commemorative edition of Brusilovsky's two dekada works, for

<sup>65</sup> Platon Kerzhentsev, 'Istochnik khudozhestvennogo obogashcheniya', *Pravda*, 14 January 1937, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Yakov Boyarskiy, 'Bol'shoy prazdnik', *Pravda*, 5 January 1937, 4.

example, was pared down to a mere thirty-two pages. Accessing national repertoire had always been, and continued to be, problematic. Reviewing the similarly condensed editions of the Georgian works, the composer Aram Khachaturian complained 'it has taken this dekada to publish even a very modest collection of names', and posed the question: 'is it really impossible to systematically introduce the work of the composers of the fraternal republics?'<sup>67</sup>

In addition to extensive press coverage, the prestige that the dekadas were attaining may also be seen from the status of those involved in their organization. Lavrenty Beria took a personal interest in overseeing preparations for the Georgian dekada. Beria would become the infamous head of the secret police after the sacking of Nikolai Yezhov in 1938. In 1931 he had been nominated by Stalin to govern Georgia, having risen through the ranks by stoking Stalin's misgivings about the Georgian party leadership. Beria had taken a hands-on role in the arts throughout his rule of Georgia. In 1935 he had personally overseen the formation of the State Ethnographic Choir of Eastern Georgia, whose 135-strong members performed at the dekada.<sup>68</sup> This became part of a broader project of employing trained musicians to set up cultural institutions in towns and villages across the country to participate in national festivals and showcases of what Caroline Bithell has called 'modernized folklore'.<sup>69</sup> While most national leaders had left dekada preparations to underlings, Beria's approach was more proactive. In late December 1936, about two weeks before the dekada was due to commence, Beria wrote to Kerzhentsev outlining the final plans (Figure 2.2). The festival would number some 800 participants, 540 of whom comprised the opera and ballet theatre. The productions would include the two great magnum opuses of the Taneyev-trained Georgian composer

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<sup>67</sup> Khachaturyan, 'Sbornik gruzinskoy muziki', *Izvestiya*, 13 January 1937, 4. Paliashvili's operas would not be published in their entirety until the 1940s, and Brusilovsky would not see any complete edition of his operas published in his lifetime. The combined edition of Paliashvili's *Abesalom and Éteri* and *Daisi* (the subject of Khachaturian's review) ran to around seventy pages. For later dekadas, the level of abridgement was only a little less severe. For the Tajik dekada in April 1941, for example, Sergei Balasanyan's dekada works were published in separate excerpted editions, averaging about sixty pages each.

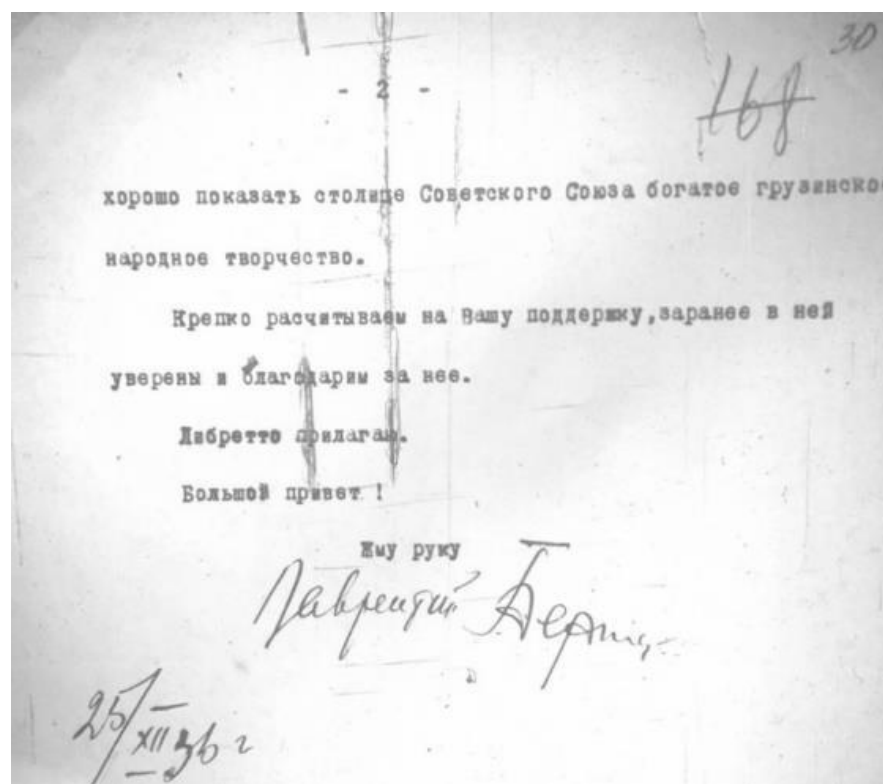
<sup>68</sup> Sandro Kavsadze, 'Khor vostochnoy Gruzii', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 7 January 1937, 3.

<sup>69</sup> See Bithell, 'Georgian Polyphony and its Journeys from National Revival to Global Heritage', in Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 578–79.



Zakharia Paliashvili (1871–1933): the operas *Abesalom and Éteri* (1909–1918) and *Daisi* (*Twilight*, 1923). Also on the bill was a comic opera *Keto and Kote* (1919) by Viktor Dolidze. The remaining two works came from the musically prolific Balanchivadze family, Meliton and his son Andrey (Meliton's other son Georgy had defected to the West in 1924, becoming a much-celebrated choreographer under the form George Balanchine). Meliton's contribution was a new version of his opera *Tamara Tsbieri* (*Tamara the Insidious*, 1897), now restyled *Darejan the Insidious*. Andrey's dekada work was the ballet *Mzechabuki* (*The Sun-Like Youth*, 1936), choreographed by the later world-renowned Vakhtang Chabukiani.<sup>70</sup>

**Figure 2.2.** Beria's signed letter to Kerzhentsev about dekada preparations.



Source: RGALI 962/21/35, 30

*Mzechabuki*, however, was quietly removed from the dekada repertoire at the very last moment. *Pravda* had promised the inclusion of the ballet in an announcement on 28 December 1936, a week before the dekada was due to begin, and an early schedule even accorded the ballet more performances than any of the operas.<sup>71</sup> The composer,

<sup>70</sup> RGALI 962/21/35, 29–30.

<sup>71</sup> 'Dekada gruzinskogo iskusstva', *Pravda*, 28 December 1936, 6; RGALI 962/21/35, 54. The archived schedule shows plans for *Mzechabuki* to be shown over three days, with two nights devoted to each opera.

interviewed on the first day of the dekada, gave no hint of a scandal, even boasting that he had led the Georgian public to ‘overcome their apprehension’ about ballet music and won their ‘open-hearted support’.<sup>72</sup> A clue to the sudden withdrawal appears in the memoirs of Beria’s son, who recalled an episode in which his father exploded at the ballet’s director and insisted the premise be rewritten.<sup>73</sup> *Mzechabuki* received its Tbilisi premiere in late December at around the same time as *Pravda* announced the dekada schedule.<sup>74</sup> Given this, the most likely explanation seems that Beria intervened after witnessing an early performance, but after composing his letter to Kerzhentsev. The revised version of the ballet (rechristened *Heart of the Mountain*) was premiered in Leningrad in 1938 and enjoyed widespread success across the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup>

Paliashvili’s operas cast Georgian music distinctively in the mould of classical Russian opera. The composer’s Georgian biographer plausibly suggests that *Abesalom and Eteri* took Borodin’s *Prince Igor* as its model but lent it an ‘international profile’.<sup>76</sup> Like Brusilovsky after him, Paliashvili’s musical ‘othering’ plays on kuchkist modal and diatonic subjectivities, especially Phrygian inflections. One case in point is Abesalom’s aria ‘I have lost my joy’, where he mourns the loss of Éteri (Example 2.3). The long, meandering

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<sup>72</sup> ‘Composer Tells of First Georgian Ballet’, *Moscow Daily News*, 6 January 1937, 3.

<sup>73</sup> The story, in Sergo Beriia’s words, went as follows:

As a demonstration of its ‘cultural achievements’ Georgia decided to show a ballet [at its dekada]. The music was good, the dancers were magnificent. The first act showed collective farmers happily working on their orange plantations; in the second act, evil imperialists appear, who have created a centre of subversive activity in the swampy regions of Colchis [a historical region of Western Georgia] to destroy the perfect life of the collective farmers. In the third act, everything falls into place: the spies were exposed and captured. Such plots were in great fashion. At that time, the psychosis was so common that all productions were made in such a delusional spirit. But my father could not contain himself.

‘We need to change the ballet’, he told the director. ‘Save the music but remove the spies. What’s more, it is not necessary to impose citrus culture on your dancers’.

‘But, Lavrenty Pavlovich, what will remain?’ the unfortunate director asked.

‘Leave the dancing and change the story’. The libretto was corrected, as he suggested, and the ballet received great recognition in Moscow.

Beriya, *Moy otets Beriia: V koridorakh stalinskoy vlasti* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 47. Aside from mistakenly claiming that the ballet was performed in Moscow, Sergo also states that the Georgian event was the first dekada.

<sup>74</sup> Pavel Khuchua (in a volume edited by Andrey Balanchivadze) states that the premiere occurred on 29 December, although Stephen Kotkin describes a performance on 27 December, which coincided with the death of one of Beria’s rivals, Nestor Lakoba, under suspicious circumstances. Khuchua, ‘Sovetskaya opera i balet’, Andrey Balanchivadze (ed.), *Gruzinskaya muzikal’naya kul’tura: sbornik statey* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1957), 208; Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler* (London: Penguin, 2017), 504–07.

<sup>75</sup> Khuchua, ‘Sovetskaya opera i balet’, 208.

<sup>76</sup> Viktor Dolidze, *Zakhariy Paliashvili*, second ed. (Moscow: Muzika, 1971), 127.

opening phrase comes to dwell on the characteristic flattened second degree of the Phrygian scale, harmonized with a typically kuchkist cadential modal seventh chord (bar 36).

**Example 2.3.** Paliashvili, *Abesalom and Éteri*, act 2, Abesalom's aria.

**Con dolore**

Ya po-te-ryal mo-yu ra-dost' i soln-tse bol'-she mne ne

sve - tit i soln-tse bol' - she mne ne sve - tit,

vii                      iv<sup>6</sup>                      i<sup>4</sup>                      #ii<sup>°</sup>                      i

I have lost my joy, and the sun no longer shines for me.

The dekada provided the first airing of Paliashvili's operas in Moscow, and they received immense attention and acclaim. Approximately eighty articles about Paliashvili alone were published in major periodicals during the dekada.<sup>77</sup> *Abesalom and Éteri* was lauded as the Georgian brother of Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, both in terms of its musical quality and in its status as an artefact of an emerging national culture.<sup>78</sup> As had been argued with Brusilovsky, Paliashvili was deemed to have attained an authenticity that transcended kuchka-style orientalism. One review of *Daisi* proffered that the quality of the work matched 'the best pages of Borodin's and Rimsky-Korsakov's musical works'. Crucially, however, Paliashvili's 'oriental' (*vostochnaya*) music was 'adorned more simply, not in

<sup>77</sup> For an annotated catalogue of the coverage, see Leila Zambakhidze, *Zakhariy Paliashvili: Bibliografiya* (Tbilisi: The Karl Marx State Republic Library of the Georgian SSR, 1966), 139–152.

<sup>78</sup> Samuil Samosud, 'Gruzinskiye operi budut postavleni v Bol'shom teatre soyuza SSR', *Pravda*, 13 January 1937, 4; Yevgenniy Braudo, 'Abesalom i Éteri', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 17 January 1937, 4. Braudo dubbed Paliashvili the 'Georgian Glinka'.

pompous, spicy, or exquisite musical garb, but more freshly and closer to the folk original'.<sup>79</sup>

The performance of Paliashvili's works at the dekada also helped cement their canonical status amongst the Soviet 'classics'. Samuil Samosud, the recently appointed principal conductor at the Bolshoi, attributed the opera's lack of success in tsarist times to a disparaging attitude towards anything 'alien' (*inorodcheskomu*).<sup>80</sup> This attitude under tsarism had also hampered the production of Georgian operas altogether. Meliton Balanchivadze (now aged seventy-six) admitted in an article that he had only managed to finish his own dekada opera *Tamara the Insidious* thanks to Soviet sponsorship, which had finally had its Tbilisi premiere in 1926.<sup>81</sup> According to Samosud, the Bolshoi had received a vocal score of *Abesalom and Ėteri* years earlier, which the theatre directorate had summarily rejected. Samosud praised the KDI for the work's rehabilitation and announced that the Bolshoi would stage its own versions of both *Abesalom and Ėteri* and *Twilight* later that year. Kerzhentsev had privately unveiled the decision to stage *Abesalom* at the Bolshoi to Stalin in April 1936, though Samosud attributed this turn of events to the progressive attitude of the Bolshoi's new leadership.<sup>82</sup> By 1951 Paliashvili's previously unknown operas had reached the opera houses of Leningrad, Yerevan, Kyiv, Saratov, Alma-Ata, Novosibirsk, and other major cities.<sup>83</sup>

Meliton Balanchivadze, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, had begun *Tamara the Insidious* in 1897, but ten years later he had only completed the first act.<sup>84</sup> In 1918, the new Soviet theatre directorate reviewed Balanchivadze's sketchy piano score (and still sketchier orchestrations) and agreed to subsidize the opera's completion, including

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<sup>79</sup> Semyon Korev, 'Daisi', *Rabochaya Moskva*, 6 January 1937, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Samosud, 'Gruzinskiye operi', 4. Samosud had replaced Nikolai Golovanov who had been sacked by the KDI in 1936 on the pretence of theatre reforms. See Simon Morrison, *Bolshoi Confidential: Secrets of the Russian Ballet from the Rule of the Tsars to Today* (London: 4th Estate, 2017), 292.

<sup>81</sup> Meliton Balanchivadze, 'Mechta kompozitora', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 17 January 1937, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Leonid Maksimenkov (ed.), *Muzika vmesto sumbura: Kompozitori i muzikanti v Strane Sovetov, 1917–1991* (Moscow: Demokratiya, 2013), 140 (reproducing RGASPI 17/163/1103, 144–46).

<sup>83</sup> Kh. Tbileli, 'O narodnosti muzikal'nogo yazika Z. Paliashvili *Daisi*', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1951/8, 77.

<sup>84</sup> G. Toradze (ed.), *Istoriya gruzinskogo muziki* (Tbilisi: Georgian Composers' Union, 1998), 44.

commissioning a libretto in Georgian.<sup>85</sup> The opera appeared at the dekada in a newly revised version, ostensibly by the composer, though much of the work of adding additional numbers and expanding the orchestration was done by the composer's son Andrey.<sup>86</sup> During the dekada, the seventy-six-year-old Balanchivadze lauded Soviet reforms in the arts, noting that he and fellow Georgian composers 'could barely have dreamed before the Revolution that our operas would be performed on the Georgian, let alone the Russian stage!'.<sup>87</sup> Now rechristened *Darejan the Insidious*, the renaming of the title character was spurred by misgivings that Muscovites would falsely assume that she represented the famed twelfth-century Georgian ruler Tamar the Great.<sup>88</sup> Similar fallacies had long circulated around Lermontov's poem 'Tamara' (the basis of Balakirev's symphonic poem of the same name). The fictional premise was rather set in the seventeenth century, based on a nineteenth-century poem by Akaki Tsereteli.<sup>89</sup> The ideological appeal of the plot, which featured a plucky artist triumphing over a despot, was not lost on critics. In his review, Aram Khachaturian detected 'the moral devastation of the aristocratic nobility, contrasting them with the image of the poet as supporter of freedom, independence, and happiness of the people'.<sup>90</sup> However, had Balanchivadze not carried the prestige of being a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, it is hard to imagine his opera attaining its short-lived canonical status.<sup>91</sup> Balanchivadze's principal training as a singer is evident from the

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<sup>85</sup> Pavel Khuchua, *Meliton Balanchivadze: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Tbilisi: Literatura da khelovneba, 1964), 93–94.

<sup>86</sup> Aside from the new title, the revisions were mostly subtle. For a detailed comparison of the versions, see Khuchua, *Balanchivadze*, Chapter 4.

<sup>87</sup> Balanchivadze, 'Mechta kompozitora', 4.

<sup>88</sup> Khuchua, *Balanchivadze*, 96

<sup>89</sup> The plot, in summary: The 'poet-patriot' hero Gocha rejects the tyrannical queen Darejan's attempts to seduce him. Gocha organizes an unsuccessful revolt against the queen, but in the face of death stands up to Darenzhan's vengeance. The queen kills herself, driven to shame in the face of Gocha's heroism.

<sup>90</sup> Khachaturian, '*Daredzhan ts'biyeri*', *Pravda*, 8 January 1937.

<sup>91</sup> The work was soon dropped from the repertoire. A later Soviet account described the opera as 'uneven' and lacking 'dramatic unity and a well thought-out, clear ideological concept'. Yuriy Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, I: 314. (Due to an apparent typographical error, the author of the section on Georgia is not credited. The likely contributor is Vladimir Donadze, who was the Georgian authority for future volumes.)

occasional vocal pyrotechnics in the score, but the music is otherwise blandly diatonic and overburdened by listless recitative.<sup>92</sup>

Viktor Dolidze's comic opera *Keto and Koté* was judged equally successful as the full-scale operas (see Figure 2.3 for a still from the dekada production). On 12 January a rave description appeared on *Pravda's* front page, noting that Stalin had attended a performance of the work with eleven high-ranking members of the Politburo. The work's light and accessible nature rendered it a ripe model of socialist realism, exemplifying all the hallmarks of unpretentious *narodnost*:

Muscovites have long gone without such a cheerful musical spectacle. Light, free of excessive pompousness, musically uncomplicated, a straightforward and light-hearted plot, sharp-witted satire, and a stimulating production, all this assures *Keto and Koté* to be a viewing experience of extreme interest.<sup>93</sup>

*Keto and Koté* was not new to Moscow, having been first performed in the capital in 1924.<sup>94</sup> But the capacity of operetta to provide accessible social commentary drove reassessment of a genre that Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko purportedly called 'champagne's sister'.<sup>95</sup> Highlighting the problem in *Literaturnaya gazeta*, the musicologist Arnold Alshvang noted that there were only a few obscure examples in the Russian repertoire: Musorgsky's *The Marriage* (1868) and *Sorochintsy Fair* (1880), and Tchaikovsky's *Cherevichki* (1885). Both of Musorgsky's contributions were left incomplete at the composer's death. Alshvang illuminated the socialist realist potential of comic opera, especially in the way that the genre promoted 'the characterization of various social types amongst the ruling classes' in an 'unpretentious' manner. But the lack of historical pedigrees was the principal challenge to Soviet comic opera, and Alshvang upheld *Keto and Koté* as a pathbreaking prototype, also hinting at the snobbish reaction it had received from certain composers:

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<sup>92</sup> While a complete score has never been published, substantial excerpts may be seen in Pavel Khuchua (ed.), *Klassiki gruzinskoy muziki: Izbranniye proizvedeniya* (Tbilisi: Gruzinskoye otdeleniye Muzfonda, 1960), 33–104.

<sup>93</sup> 'Opera *Keto i Koté* v postanovke Tbilisskogo teatra operi i baleta', *Pravda*, 12 January 1937, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Gozenpud, *Russkiy sovetskiy operniy teatr*, 404.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Vadim Shershenevich, 'Operetta Enjoys Wide Popularity in the USSR', *Moscow News*, 26 June 1939.

Our Soviet composers, who often speak ill of the so-called light genre, should have been less quick to tire of the achievements of the Tbilisi theatre in the field of comic music [...] this genre is only appreciated by us scarce few'.<sup>96</sup>

In the absence of Russian models, *Keto and Koté* was stylistically Italianate. Branding Dolidze the 'Rossini of Tbilisi', David Zaslavsky highlighted the work's reliance on the Italian comic style, drawing parallels with Hulak-Artemovskiy's *Cossack Beyond the Danube* (see Chapter 1).<sup>97</sup>

Thanks to the dekadas, light works such as *Keto and Koté*, *Cossack Beyond the Danube*, and Uzeir Hajibeyov's *Arshin mal alan* (purportedly Stalin's favourite)<sup>98</sup> became established in Soviet theatre repertoires, also receiving (sometimes multiple) film adaptations. *Keto's* canonical position was further cemented in 1950 when it was credited with a production by the illustrious Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, in a new musical arrangement by Vano Muradeli.<sup>99</sup> This was a rehabilitation project for Muradeli, who had found himself the hapless target of rebuke in 1948 over his opera *The Great Friendship*. Itself crafted in the loftiest spirit of Soviet nationalities policy, Muradeli's opera had been the catalyst for Zhdanov's broader attack on musical life. The Georgian-born composer shared Stalin's sleepy birthplace of Gori, and at the time of the Georgian dekada was still a student of Myaskovsky at the Conservatoire. Despite his student status, the up-and-coming Muradeli was nonetheless interviewed for his thoughts on Georgian music, expressing high hopes for its future.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Al'shvang, 'Problema sovetskoy komicheskoy operi: Po povodu *Keto i Koté*', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 15 January 1937, 5.

<sup>97</sup> David Zaslavskiy, 'Mastera vesel'ya i smekha: *Keto i Koté*, komicheskaya opera V. I. Dolidze', *Pravda*, 12 January 1937, 6.

<sup>98</sup> Matthew O'Brien, 'Uzeyir Hajibeyov and Music in Azerbaidzhan', in Neil Edmunds (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin* (London: Routledge, 2004), 221.

<sup>99</sup> 'Novosti iskusstva', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 25 April 1950, 1. See also Abram Gozenpud, 'Opera Dolidze *Keto i Koté*', <[http://www.belcanto.ru/opera\\_keto.html](http://www.belcanto.ru/opera_keto.html)> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>100</sup> Ivan Muradeli, 'National Art Fostered by Soviet Power', *Moscow Daily News*, 16 January 1937, 3.

**Figure 2.3.** The dekada production of *Keto and Koté*.



Source: *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* (17 January 1937, 4).

At the now customary Kremlin reception, Stalin sat with members of his Politburo, while Kerzhentsev and Molotov delivered speeches showering the Georgians with praise.<sup>101</sup> According to one memoir, when Beria showed the honours list to Stalin, the latter complained that there were too few names, prompting Beria to run frantically between tables looking for more prize-winners.<sup>102</sup> The anecdote has some archival support, since the Politburo's copy of the list has 'under Beria's control' scrawled at the top of the front page.<sup>103</sup> The final list, published in *Pravda* the next day included forty-seven names, ten receiving the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, the rest being allocated the less prestigious Badge of Honour.<sup>104</sup> Beria had perhaps been guided by the example of the Kazakh and Ukrainian dekadas, at which only twelve and eighteen awards had been granted respectively.<sup>105</sup> But even adjusting for the increased number of participants at the Georgian dekada, the increase in awards was substantial. Considerable financial investment was also announced, far exceeding anything announced at either preceding dekada. The Opera and Ballet theatre collectively received the Order of Lenin and

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<sup>101</sup> 'Priyem v Kremle uchastnikov dekadi gruzinskogo iskusstva', *Pravda*, 15 January 1937, 1. See also *Izvestiya*, 15 January 1937, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Memoir of Nino Ramishvili, in Igor' Obolenskiy (ed.), *Memuari materi Stalina: 13 zhenshchini Dzhugashvili* (Moscow: AST, 2013), Chapter 6.

<sup>103</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1133, 70–73. The typewritten document also shows signs of hurried preparation. Many first names and patronymics are omitted, scrawled in by hand afterwards.

<sup>104</sup> 'O nagrazhdenii rabotnikov tbilisskogo teatra operi i baleta', *Pravda*, 15 January 1937, 1.

<sup>105</sup> *Pravda*, 27 May 1936, 1. Four Kazakhs were granted the Order of the Red Banner, while the remaining eight received the Badge of Honour. In the Ukrainian case, four received the Order of the Red Banner, and fourteen the Badge of honour.



investments of over five million roubles were promised to Georgian art: to improve conditions at the conservatoire and the opera house, including the creation of a residential building for theatre workers. The same order also promised to increase Kerzhentsev's KDI budget by more than five million roubles (given that the KDI's budget in 1936 had been 15 million, this was a substantial windfall).<sup>106</sup> Moreover, all members of the Opera and Ballet theatre as well as the ethnographic choirs of Eastern and Western Georgia were accorded a personal grant equal to two months' salary.<sup>107</sup>

### **Cult of Personality**

According to his son Sergo, Lavrenty Beria claimed to have first proposed the concept of dekadas to Stalin, the ostensible purpose of which would be 'to illustrate officially the beneficial influence of Russian culture on national culture'. Stalin had apparently been so enamoured by the idea that he had 'passed it off as his own'.<sup>108</sup> The second-hand memoir has no supporting evidence; Stalin never claimed personal credit for the dekadas, though press coverage ascribed their success to him, inasmuch as the conditions of Stalinism (and Leninism before it) had kindled the flourishing of national art.<sup>109</sup> Stalin was placed firmly in the public eye, attending virtually every dekada production, accompanied by various members of his Politburo (for a full list of productions that Stalin attended, see Appendix 1). Each official visit was announced the following day on *Pravda's* front page, cuttings of which were carefully curated in Stalin's personal archive.<sup>110</sup> Such reports were often accompanied by an official portrait, with its subject sitting in the royal box, focused rapturously on the stage (Figure 2.4). Apocryphally, Stalin attended Bolshoi productions

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<sup>106</sup> *Pravda*, 15 January 1937, 1. For the original orders, see RGASPI 17/163/1133, 73–76. Beria and Kerzhentsev are both cited as witnesses to the originals. On the KDI budget for 1936, see Irina Kotkina, 'Soviet Empire and the Operatic Realm', *Revue des études slaves* 94 (2013), 513.

<sup>107</sup> *Pravda*, 15 January 1937, 1. The personal grant of two months' salary became common practice thereafter. See, for instance, the Azerbaijani dekada announcement: 'O premirovaniye uchastnikov azerbaydzhanskoy dekadi', *Izvestiya*, 18 April 1938, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Sergo Beriia, *Moy otets Beriia: V koridorakh stalinskoy vlasti* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002), 46.

<sup>109</sup> A typical example: 'The great leaders of communism, Lenin and Stalin, taught the great Russian people how to achieve victory, and how to access equality and friendship between nations. This victory is in our hands. The cohesive brotherly friendship of the peoples has been achieved and we see its beautiful fruits. The dekada of Georgian art in Moscow, like the two previous dekadas, demonstrates just a modicum of these successes'. 'Znametnatel'naya dekada', *Pravda*, 7 January 1937, 1.

<sup>110</sup> See RGASPI 558/11/1479.

by means of an underground passageway that led from the Kremlin directly to the government box.<sup>111</sup> Occasionally, stories surfaced that demonstrated Stalin's genuine fondness and acumen for music. He had seen Balanchivadze's *Tamara the Insidious* a decade before the dekada, on an official visit to Tbilisi in 1926. According to Balanchivadze's recollections, Stalin was introduced to the composer afterwards and noted that the work bore the hallmarks of Rimsky-Korsakov, apparently unaware that he had studied with 'that great Russian composer'.<sup>112</sup>

Figure 2.4a. Stalin pictured at the premiere of Balanchivadze's *Darejan the Insidious*.



Source: Pravda (8 January 1937).

<sup>111</sup> Yekaterina Vlasova, 'The Stalinist Opera Project', in Patrick Zuk and Marina Frolova-Walker (eds), *Russian Music Since 1917: Reappraisal and Rediscovery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 165.

<sup>112</sup> Balanchivadze, 'Mechta kompozitora', 4.

Figure 2.4b. Zhdanov, Molotov, and Stalin (left to right) at Brusilovsky's Kiz-Zhibek.



Source: Kazakhstanskaya pravda (29 May 1936).

Figure 2.4c. Stalin, Molotov, Andreyev, Zhdanov, and others at the final concert of the Azerbaijani dekada.



Source: Bakinskiy rabochiy (22 April 1938).

The role of gratitude to the leader had become especially vehement in Soviet discourse by the mid-1930s.<sup>113</sup> This facet of Soviet kowtowing became enshrined at the dekadas in the genre of the Stalin Ode (*Pesnya o Staline*), usually performed in the final concert that closed each festival. Ukraine had begun the tradition with an example by Lev Revutsky. Not to be outdone, the Kazakhs supplied a whole collection of Stalin odes as well as songs hailing figures such as Molotov and Kalinin.<sup>114</sup> The most celebrated of the Kazakh texts was published under the dubiously credited authorship of the folk singer Dzhambul Dzhabayev, later set to music by Myaskovsky.<sup>115</sup>

The story of Dzhambul deserves further elaboration, which Shostakovich purportedly called Gogolian ‘chicanery on an epochal level’.<sup>116</sup> In 1935 a writer named Pavel Kuznetsov published translations of a folk singer named Mayimbet in a Kazakh newspaper. The translations captured wide acclaim, and in early 1936 Kazakh authorities ordered the organizers of the dekada to, as Brusilovsky recalled, ‘find akyn Mayimbet, smarten him up, dress him well and include him in the Kazakhstan delegation so that he could compose a poem in honour of Stalin’.<sup>117</sup> But Kuznetsov was evasive when questioned about the identity of the mysterious folk hero, providing tenuous and unfruitful leads, leading many to believe that Mayimbet was a fabrication. With time running out for the dekada organizers, an akyn (folk singer) by the name of Dzhambul was hurriedly plucked from a village not far from Alma-Ata. Dzhambul spoke hardly any Russian, and

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<sup>113</sup> See Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>114</sup> ‘Sbornik kazakhskikh narodnikh pevtsov *Pesni o Staline*’, *Kazakhstanskaya pravda*, 21 May 1936, 1.

<sup>115</sup> See Patrick Zuk, *Nikolay Myaskovsky: A Composer and His Times* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021), 366.

<sup>116</sup> Konstantin Bodganov notes the similarity between Brusilovsky’s memoir of the Dzhambul affair and that offered in Shostakovich’s purported memoirs ‘as related and edited by Solomon Volkov’. Shostakovich ascribes his version of the story to a ‘composer friend’ who ‘worked for decades in Kazakhstan’ and was ‘a graduate of the Leningrad Conservatoire, also in Steinberg’s class but a year before me’. Although not mentioned by name, this was clearly Brusilovsky. The similarity between Shostakovich’s recollection provided in *Testimony* and Brusilovsky’s later published memoirs plausibly suggests that this episode was genuinely related to Volkov by Shostakovich. See Bogdanov, *Vox populi: Fol’klornīye zhanri sovetskoy kul’turi* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2009), 296; Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitry Shostakovich*, Antonina Bouis (trans.) (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 208–211. On unreliability and plagiarism in *Testimony*, see Malcom Hamrick Brown (ed.), *A Shostakovich Casebook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Bogdanov, *Vox populi*, 296 (citing ‘Brusilovskiy o Dzhambule’, *Svoboda slova*, 5 June 2007).

his translators fabricated most of his poems, and yet he soon became among the most celebrated Soviet poets. At the dekada he received the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, and on a visit to Moscow two years later this was upgraded to an Order of Lenin. In 1941 he was issued a Stalin Prize. Kuznetsov became Dzhabul's official 'translator', and by the late 1930s an entire industry of Dzhabul 'translations' had arisen.<sup>118</sup>

The dekada Stalin odes came, rather predictably, in the form of strident major-mode marches. Revutsky's contribution to the Ukrainian dekada involved an introduction with insistent posturing on the tonic then ostentatious accompanying flourishes with the vocal entry (Example 2.4a). One of the most celebrated contributions at the Kazakh dekada was the example composed by Kazakh musician and actor Manarbek Yerzhanov (who also performed roles in both of Brusilovsky's dekada music dramas). After a sprightly and building introduction, Yerzhanov's ode (rendered in Western notation by Brusilovsky) settles into a plodding chordal accompaniment under long, metrically ambiguous phrases (Example 2.4b). The song was judged to be broadly successful, though Georgiy Khubov found some fault with Brusilovsky's 'European-style' processing of the song, foreshadowing the aforementioned criticism of the composer's music dramas.<sup>119</sup> The most celebrated Georgian models were provided by Iona Tuskiya and Grigory Kiladze, whose bravado abounds with overburdened fanfares and fortissimos, the former taking the form of an anthem, while the hymn-like homophony of the latter borders on the pseudo-religious (Examples 2.4c and 2.4d). During the festival, it was announced that Kiladze's Stalin ode was to serve as the culmination of an enormous symphony about the Revolution, which would culminate in the depiction of a national festival, with Stalin 'a symbol for the liberation of mankind'.<sup>120</sup> In general, the texts to these odes drew poetic recourse to the natural world, serving as a metaphor either for Stalin's greatness or for the fruits of his achievements.

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<sup>118</sup> For an in-depth study of the Dzhabul phenomenon, see Konstantin Bogdanov (ed.), *Dzhabul Dzhabayev: Priklyucheniya kazakhskogo akına v sovetskoy strane* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2013). See also Katharine Holt, 'Performing as Soviet Central Asia's Source Texts: Lahuti and Džambul in Moscow, 1935–1936', *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 24 (2015), 213–38.

<sup>119</sup> Georgiy Khubov, 'Pesni o Staline', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/12, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Shalva Aslanishvili, 'Ob etapakh razvitiya gruzinskoy muziki', *Noviy mir* 1937/2, 287.

**Example 2.4a.** Revutsky, *Ode to Stalin* (1936).<sup>121</sup>

Marsheobrazno (alla marcia)

Vzmil or - lom ot gor vi - so-kikh Si zo - kri-liy ve - li - kan.

A soaring eagle from mountains high, a grey-winged giant

**Example 2.4b.** Yerzhanov and Brusilovsky, *Ode to Stalin* (1936).

Ne ochen' bistro (not too fast)

Zdrav-stvuy

vozd', zdrav-stvuy, Stal-in, zdrav-stvuy, nash ot-ets rod - noy zdrav-stvuy, Stal-in, so-kol yas - niy

Greetings, leader, greetings, Stalin, greetings, dear father, greetings, splendid Falcon!<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Sources are as follows: Revutsky: *Pesni krasnoy armii* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye voyennoye izdatel'stvo, 1937), 3–4; Yerzhanov/Brusilovskiy, *Da zdravstvuyet: Kazakhskaya pesnya o Staline* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1936), a copy is preserved at RGALI 962/21/38, 62–67. Tuskiya and Kiladze's odes were respectively published in *Sovetskaya muzika* 1936/11 and 1937/12 (both unpaginated).

<sup>122</sup> *Sokol yasniy* ('clear' or 'splendid' falcon) is an established poetic metaphor for a male hero, as in 'On – moy sokol yasniy' (He is my splendid falcon), the recitative and duet sung by the triumphantly returning Igor and his wife in the final act of Borodin's *Prince Igor*.

**Example 2.4c. Tuskiya, Ode to Stalin (1936).**

Musical score for Example 2.4c, featuring vocal parts for Tenors I and II and Bass, with piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *Marciale*, *Maestoso*, *mf*, *f*, and *sfz*. The lyrics are in Russian and English.

Clouds rush above the mountains  
 The falcon soars above the lightning  
 But you, our mighty leader, who can sing about you?  
 Reddening dawn, burn like a ruby!  
 Sing, earth! The sun shines before us!  
 Stalin, Stalin our beloved.

**Example 2.4d. Kiladze, Ode to Stalin (1936), opening fanfare and vocal parts.**

Musical score for Example 2.4d, featuring piano accompaniment and vocal parts. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *Bodro i muzhestvenno (briskly and manfully)*, *f*, *p*, and *p cresc.*. The lyrics are in Russian and English.

Our great friend Stalin,  
 Leader, loved by all the land,  
 The fruit is ripe, it had been tended  
 For the country at your hand.  
 Beloved leader!

Jan Plamper has argued that Stalin's personality cult functioned like alchemy, whose resulting culturally constructed 'sacral aura' amounted to a greater force than the sum of its parts.<sup>123</sup> Plamper also observes that the press coverage of the Georgian dekada downplayed Stalin's personal Georgian heritage, which he ascribes to a conscious desire to portray Stalin's supranational status as 'father of the peoples' (*otets narodov*).<sup>124</sup> Occasionally, however, evidence of Stalin's passion for his heritage made it through. One Georgian opera singer at the Kremlin reception relayed Stalin's evident passion for Georgian culture:

In one of the halls of the Kremlin Palace we performed Georgian folk songs. Our beloved and dear leader Comrade Stalin stood at the centre of the hall, surrounded by theatre artists. Comrade Stalin explained to us how to sing the old Georgian songs. We listened to the leader with love and attention. Stalin began to sing a comic Kartalinsky<sup>125</sup> song. We soon mastered the song and sang it together with the leader. Afterwards, the leader said to us, smiling: 'I know and sing not only Kartalinsky, but Gurian [Western Georgian] songs.' Immediately Comrade Stalin called the Gurian singers and sang a Gurian song with them. It was a wonderful evening that will always remain in my memory.<sup>126</sup>

But the holistic power of Stalin's personality cult could trigger the most frenzied and ecstatic responses even amongst anti-Stalinists and dissidents.<sup>127</sup> Yet by 1937, dekada-style national works seemed to have attained a cult-like aura of their own. In April 1937, a new Brusilovsky work was brought to Moscow by the Kazakhs, this time the fully-fledged opera *Yer-Targ'in*, which the composer had completed in a mere two months.<sup>128</sup> The eminent writer Aleksey Tolstoy recorded his response to the work in *Izvestiya*, describing a transcendent, almost hysterical experience of national comradeship that surpassed mere lip-service to Stalinist nationalities policies:

From the very first sound of Kazakh folk music, with the first movement of the actors, with the first sound of foreign voices, I feel the prejudices in me slipping away. In front of me is a theatre, yet something more than a theatre. My eyes are opened. Fondly, with gratitude, with delight. [...] The movements of actors, their dances, their facial expressions embody the inexplicable grace of some primordial pride. Believe, believe. Their incomprehensible language becomes clear. [...] Here they are, the first gifts of the great treasury of Asia. Here is the USSR's answer to the world's quest for human happiness. This is our

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<sup>123</sup> Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 46–47.

<sup>124</sup> Plamper, 'Georgian Koba or Soviet "Father of the Peoples"? The Stalin Cult and Ethnicity' in Balázs Apor et al. (eds), *The Leadership Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 127.

<sup>125</sup> A region within Russia on Kazakhstan's northern border.

<sup>126</sup> Petre Amiranishvili, 'S nami pel Stalin', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 17 January 1937, 4.

<sup>127</sup> For some examples, see Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 10–16.

<sup>128</sup> Messman, 'Yevgeniy Brusilovsky', 36.



communal-national [*obshchenatsional'naya*] pride, confirmation of the Leninist idea that great creative power lurks amongst the people.<sup>129</sup>

Outside of public spaces, such responses to Brusilovsky's works were by no means unanimous. During a visit to Alma-Ata in 1946, Prokofiev complained of enduring 'a few horribly primitive operas by Brusilovsky, which I forced myself to sit through by the duty of a composer intent on writing something on Kazakh materials myself'.<sup>130</sup> Prokofiev's Kazakh opera *Khan Buzay* was left incomplete, though he was not the only high-profile Russian composer to accept such commissions to curry official favour. Shostakovich similarly accepted a commission to compose an opera for Turkmenistan in 1938, though left the project entirely unrealized.<sup>131</sup>

Certainly, the reception of Brusilovsky's music was polarizing, but such views held little sway over the reputation in its home republic, which has continued to celebrate his music ever since. Émigré composers such as Brusilovsky ('mualims', as Vinogradov dubbed them), came to hold an extraordinarily lasting status in the republics they chose to represent, and the dekadas were extraordinarily effective in raising the profile of their music across the Soviet Union. Although Brusilovsky represented the first of these composers, he was soon joined by Vladimir Vlasov and Vladimir Feré in Kyrgyzstan (see Chapter 4), Markian Frolov in Buryat-Mongolia, and Sergei Balasanyan in Tajikistan (both explored in Chapter 5).

Many scholars have noted that the dekadas attained a monumental status in Soviet life. However, the chapter has suggested that this status did not attain its full 'cult' status until 1937, and the scale and ambition of the Georgian festival seem to have been an especially pivotal factor in that transition. Moreover, this chapter has begun to develop a more complex understanding of transcultural exchange, which will be more fully developed in the proceeding two chapters. Russian composers who composed music for the republics were hardly immune from received colonialist pretensions, nor can they be fully divorced from the imperialist aspects of the system in which they worked. However,

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<sup>129</sup> Aleksey Tolstoy, 'Na spektakle *Yer-Targin*', *Izvestiya*, 24 April 1937, 4.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Prokofiev to Myaskovsky, 12 June 1943, in Miral'da Kozlova and Nina Yatsenko (eds), *S. S. Prokof'yev i N. Ya. Myaskovskiy: Perepiska* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 1977), 470.

<sup>131</sup> Viktor Vinogradov, 'Vstrechi i razmishleniya', in Marina Rakhmanova (ed.), *Shostakovich – Urtext* (Moscow: GTsMMK, 2006), 76.

most developed a deep personal respect for the republics in which they worked, which should be borne in mind when evaluating the nature of Soviet transcultural exchange. In the following chapter, taking the dekada activities of Reinhold Glière as a case study, I further explore how colonial and anticolonial narrative interacted in musical discourse.

### Chapter 3 – ‘Creative Synthesis’: Reinhold Glière and the Azerbaijani and Uzbek Dekadas

With respect to the young generation of conservatoire graduates who were being dispatched as musical advocates to the Soviet republics in the mid-1930s, Reinhold Glière (1875–1956) represented the previous generation.<sup>1</sup> He studied first in Kyiv and then at the Moscow Conservatoire with Taneyev and Ippolitov-Ivanov. The latter, a student of Rimsky-Korsakov, inherited his teacher’s taste for folk music, especially of the Caucasus where he worked for a decade after finishing at the conservatoire. Ippolitov-Ivanov encouraged his students to pursue ‘detailed study of folk music’, and Glière recalled studying folksong collections and combing through the works of Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov in search of authentic folksongs.<sup>2</sup> Although some of Glière’s early works brushed with modernism, most notably the post-Skriabinesque Third Symphony (‘Ilya Muromets’, 1911), his music was largely inclined towards the conservative side. Conservatism, however, was no barrier to success: he enjoyed a prestigious and scandal-free career, and his works were even patchily performed in the West during his lifetime. Glière’s success in this regard owed much to the efforts of Leopold Stokowski, who conducted the Third Symphony so often in America that by 1943 the parts were completely worn out, and Glière obliged a plea for a new set.<sup>3</sup> In his homeland meanwhile, Glière rose to become a significant figure in Soviet musical life: from 1938 to 1948 he headed the Organizing Committee of the Composers’ Union, and from 1940 he chaired the Stalin Prize Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Zoya Gulinskaya’s 1986 biography of Glière remains the most authoritative, benefiting from substantial access to the composer’s personal archive, although as with many late-Soviet biographies archival sources are not methodically referenced. Previous biographical attempts such as those of Igor Bêlza and Natalya Petrova (Bêlza’s wife) are sketchy and sparsely referenced. See Gulinskaya, *Reyngol’d Moritsevich Gliér* (Moscow: Muzika, 1986); Igor Bêlza, *R. M. Gliér* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1962); Natalya Petrova, *Reyngol’d Moritsevich Gliér: Kratkii ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1962). Also of value are two substantial collections of articles: Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovskiy (ed.), *Reyngol’d Moritsevich Gliér: Stat’i, vospominaniya, material’i*, 2 vols (Moscow: Muzika, 1965–67); and Vasiliy Kiselyov (ed.), *Reyngol’d Gliér: Stat’i i vospominaniya* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Gliér, ‘Narod – velikiy uchitel’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1953/1, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Gulinskaya, *Gliér*, 73.

Glière produced a wide-ranging catalogue of national works. His first venture in this regard was the tone poem *Zaporozhtsi* (*The Zaporozhye Cossacks*, 1921), based on Ukrainian national themes. Other major orchestral works include the *Heroic March of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR* (*Geroicheskiy marsh Buryat-Mongolskoy ASSR*, 1936), composed during a trip to Eastern Siberia in 1934. This was later joined by *The Fergana Festival* (*Ferganskiy prazdnik*, 1940), which celebrated the construction of a massive irrigation canal in the Fergana valley of Uzbekistan, a project which rendered swathes of arid land fertile.<sup>4</sup> Also amongst Glière's national works are numerous smaller pieces and film scores. However, the most substantial of the composer's national works were the operas and music dramas he composed for Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. The first of these was the Azerbaijani opera *Shakh-Senem* (1925, rev. 1934), which received its Moscow premiere at the republic's 1938 dekada. In 1936 Glière travelled to Uzbekistan to create the music drama *Gyulsara* for the forthcoming dekada in Moscow. In 1940 he returned to Uzbekistan to collaborate with Talib Sadikov on the opera *Leyli and Mejnun*. Then in 1949, he collaborated with Sadikov again to turn *Gyulsara* into a fully-fledged opera.

Although Glière avowed to establish 'creative synthesis' in his national works between European and indigenous music, many have observed that he still relied heavily on the orientalist signifiers established by the kuchka. Marina Frolova-Walker, for instance, suggests that in *Shakh-Senem* Glière 'set a precedent for complacent Orientalism' in national operas.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Dorothea Redepenning argues that the operas presented at the Azerbaijani dekada succeeded only as 'European representational opera' rather than truly national works, since they merely plugged token national tropes into established Western forms. In this light, she suggests that 'Glière and Azerbaijani composers themselves submitted their culture to Soviet domination'.<sup>6</sup> A similar (although more nuanced) argument is made by Sablin, Volkov, and Dobatkina. Although they reject a purely Orientalist reading of Glière's national works in favour of an approach tuned to

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<sup>4</sup> Glière visited the construction site in the Summer of 1940. *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 330.

<sup>6</sup> Dorothea Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und der sowjetischen Musik*, 2 vols (Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 2008), II: 320.

transnationalism studies, they nonetheless admit that Glière's national music mostly ended up serving Western genres, and only 'to a modest extent and within the limited musical space of the Soviet Union'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, while charges of colonialism and Orientalism are entrenched in received wisdom about Glière and his work, they have not yet been submitted to detailed appraisal. In this regard, my principal aim for this chapter is concerned with how matters of colonialism manifested in the creation and reception of *Shakh-Senem* and *Gyulsara* at the Uzbek and Azerbaijani dekadas.

During the Azerbaijani dekada, Glière published an article under the title 'Creative Synthesis', stipulating how his national works sought to subsume creative sources across national divides. Practically, it entailed travelling to the republic in question, immersing himself in local culture, collecting authentic materials, and collaborating with local composers and musicians.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on this later in life, Glière envisaged this project as working towards a more spiritual interaction with, and responsibility towards Soviet audiences:

The composer of the Soviet epoch must foster a creative approach towards national art, not statically as if in a museum. Our audiences have the right to expect from us, Soviet composers, works permeated with profound ideological content [*ideynost'*], responding to all the varied spiritual needs of our great people.<sup>9</sup>

But while the nineteenth-century Tsarist regime was widely dismissed as colonialist, the musical features of its music still held promise for many. A strong advocate of this position (and one who shared Glière's conservative tastes) was Moisey Grinberg, the KDI's spokesman for musicological affairs. He conjectured during the Azerbaijani dekada that the 'oriental theme' of Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Glinka, and Borodin had paved the way for Soviet national music. Grinberg argued that these composers were innocent of the vague aestheticizing tendencies of European musical orientalism, which reduced the music of the East to exotic 'Oriental confectionery'.<sup>10</sup> During the previous (Uzbek) dekada, Grinberg had made this argument even more

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<sup>7</sup> Ivan Sablin, Alexander Wolkow, and Darja Dobatkina, 'Vom Orientalismus zur Transkulturalität: Asien in der klassischen Musik zur Sowjetzeit', Igor Narskij (ed.), *Hochkultur für das Volk?: Literatur, Kunst, und Musik in der Sowjetunion aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 173.

<sup>8</sup> Gliér, 'Tvorcheskiy sintez', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 4 April 1938, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Gliér, 'Narod – velikiy uchitel', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1953/1, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Grinberg, 'Novaya éra muziki', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 18 April 1938.

vehemently, outright rejecting any notion that rooting Soviet national opera in *kuchkist* models risked perpetuating colonialist legacies:

The experience of Russian musical culture – the experience of the geniuses of Russian music – Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov – should be used critically by the composers of all our republics. [...] RAPM ‘theorists’ have claimed that Russian composers who used Eastern songs supposedly reflected in their work the colonialist policies of the Tsarist autocracy and Russian capitalism. Utter nonsense! It is time to understand that the great Russian musicians, who collected and used the folklore of various nations in their music, not only enriched their own work and musical language, but also did much to develop the national cultures of our Union.<sup>11</sup>

That Grinberg felt the need to make this point at all shows that the arguments espoused in the 1920s exposing the *kuchka*’s colonialism still held some sway.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Glière’s deference to nineteenth-century practices became the foremost stumbling-block to the critical success of his national works. Most in question was whether his music engendered enough progressive or ‘authentic’ elements to represent a sufficiently balanced synthesis between the cultures it sought to connect.

### *Shakh-Senem*

Glière’s national opera project had begun a decade before it had been affirmed by party ideologues, when he was invited to compose a national opera for Azerbaijan. The invitation had come from the Azerbaijani singer Shevket Mamedova, who had met the composer in 1918 while a student in Kyiv where Glière was teaching. According to her memoir, during her time in Kyiv Mamedova would regularly sing Azerbaijani folksongs which the composer would transcribe.<sup>13</sup> In 1921, by which time Glière and Mamedova had respectively returned to foster careers in Moscow and Azerbaijan, the singer wrote to the composer asking if he would be willing to write an Azerbaijani opera. Glière replied in the affirmative: ‘I could write it through the summer. I could write in the Caucasus in August, September, and October, then finish it in Moscow’.<sup>14</sup> Mamedova referred the case to the Azerbaijani branch of Narkompros, who extended a formal invitation. A meeting was convened in Mamedova’s home to discuss the opera; among those present were Glière,

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<sup>11</sup> Grinberg, ‘Volnuyushchiy spektakl’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 29 May 1937.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion, see Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 307–11.

<sup>13</sup> Shevket Mamedova, ‘Slovo o moyem druge i uchitele’, in V. M. Bogdanov-Berezovskiy (ed.), *Reyngol’d Moritsevich Gliér*, II: 247.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 248.

Mustafa Kuliyeu (Azerbaijani Minister for Culture), and the Azerbaijani writers Abdul Ragim-bek Akhverdiyev and Dzhafar Dzhafarli. During the discussion, Akhverdiyev suggested the story of *Ashik Gerib* as a premise. Glière agreed, being familiar with Lermontov's short story on the same premise. Dzhafarli agreed to write the libretto, with the agreement that the emphasis would be shifted onto the lead female character Shakh-Senem, after whom the opera would be titled.<sup>15</sup> The decision to reframe the premise was most likely in order to give Mamedova the leading role; when Glière had first responded to Mamedova's invitation, he had stipulated that 'if I were to write an Eastern opera, it would be with [Mamedova's] voice in mind'.<sup>16</sup>

Soon Dzhafarli had drawn up the libretto: Shakh-Senem's father imprisons her lover, the Ashug singer Kerib, as she is pledged to the unpopular Shakhveled. Shakh-Senem frees Kerib, who flees into exile. While banished, Kerib participates in a singing competition, the prize for which is the presentation of a necklace by the Khan's daughter. In a scene reminiscent of *Die Meistersinger*, Kerib easily overcomes all competition, to the annoyance of the Khan and his henchmen. By chance, Kerib learns that Shakh-Senem will marry Shakhveled the next day. Kerib appeals to the admiring crowd for help, who supply a magical horse, which carries him back to Shakh-Senem to halt the wedding just in time.<sup>17</sup>

The timing of Glière's visit had great political currency for Kuliyeu, who had long encouraged national operas. In 1924 Kuliyeu instigated a polemical discussion about the development of Soviet opera in the pages of the Azerbaijani edition of the newspaper *Kommunist*.<sup>18</sup> In the same year, the Azerbaijani branch of Narkompros held a public debate and declared that operas should be produced in the European manner, and performed for the 'Turkic masses' in their own language.<sup>19</sup> Until *Shakh-Senem*, the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>17</sup> A full libretto may be found at RGALI 962/21/14, 60ff.

<sup>18</sup> V. Zeydman, 'Glièr i azerbaidzhanskaya muzikal'naya kul'tura', in Bogdanov-Berezovsky (ed.), *Stat'i, vospominaniya, materialy*, 216–17. Early protests from 'bourgeois nationalists' was also widely reported during the Azerbaijani dekada. For instance, Viktor Vinogradov, 'Istoki azerbaidzhanskogo natsional'noy operi', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/3, 74.

<sup>19</sup> The order is quoted in Yuriy Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, 5 vols (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1970), I: 338 (no author is credited for this section).

established form of opera in Azerbaijan was the hybrid mugham opera, a genre of music theatre which incorporated extensive folk improvisation, established by Uzeir Hajibeyov's *Leyli i Mejnun* (1907–08). For some traditionalists, Glière's opera was seen to be enforcing European dogma on a naturally evolving genre. Some went so far as to call Glière a 'Varangian' (i.e. Viking) outsider who was 'undermining' authentic national culture.<sup>20</sup> The creation of the opera thus became embroiled in a debate about Azerbaijani music's compatibility with European music.<sup>21</sup>

The first version of *Shakh-Senem* was premiered in Baku in 1927, sung in Russian rather than Azeri.<sup>22</sup> Mamedova was not able to perform the title role, as she was studying in Italy. Though there was some positive reception, repeat performances were purportedly suppressed by disapproving nationalists.<sup>23</sup> One reviewer complained of the first performance, 'It would be a huge mistake to assume that Glière could create [our] national operatic style. The composer did not even seek to pose such a task for himself. Turkic opera must be created by Turkic composers. This is an axiom'.<sup>24</sup> Yet Kuliyeu continued to promote the need for opera reform. In 1928 *Kommunist* published an article 'Azerbaijani Opera is in a State of Agony'. The pronouncement was accompanied by the mantra 'We need new Azerbaijani Operas', ascribed to oil and railway workers, and an article entitled 'Either Cultured, Modern Opera or Nothing!'<sup>25</sup> When Mamedova returned to Azerbaijan in 1929, she pushed to have the opera restaged, and Glière was recruited to make revisions. The composer returned to Baku in 1931, where he stayed for two and a half years, working on a new version of the opera. Dzhabarli, slowed by ailing health, gradually translated his libretto into Azeri, while Glière expanded the instrumentation.<sup>26</sup>

Marina Frolova-Walker demonstrates that *Shakh-Senem* adopted 'time-worn elements of Russian Orientalism dating back to the Kuchka', such as the flattened sixth in

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<sup>20</sup> Gulinskaya, *Gliër*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 402.

<sup>22</sup> Abram Gozenpud, *Russkiy sovetskiy operniy teatr (1917–1941)* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1963), 392.

<sup>23</sup> Gulinskaya, *Gliër*, 115.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Aida Huseynova, *Music of Azerbaijan: From Mugham to Opera* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 94.

<sup>25</sup> Zeydman, 'Gliër i azerbaidzhanskaya muzikal'naya kul'tura', 217.

<sup>26</sup> Mamedova, 'Slovo', 252.



major-mode contexts and the prevalence of melodic augmented seconds. She suggests that the presence of such essentializing features weakens its status as an expression of Azerbaijani national identity.<sup>27</sup> Such features are indeed widespread in *Shakh-Senem*, being especially prominent in Kerib's material (Frolova-Walker cites Kerib's aria from Act 1). But while such kuchkist stereotypes certainly abound, they by no means permeate the whole opera. *Shakh-Senem*'s music, for instance, is often more chromatic, impressionistic, and replete with late-romantic tonal subjectivity. Her aria 'In Wide Valleys' displays fierce surface chromaticism, remote extended chords that defy the prevailing E-flat minor tonality (Example 3.1). One reviewer of the dekada production cited this aria as evidence that Glière had surpassed kuchkist orientalism.<sup>28</sup>

**Example 3.1.** Glière, *Shakh-Senem*, Shakh-Senem's aria 'In Wide Valleys'.

17 [Agitato]

Chu - de - sniy mig pri shel

O, na - slazh - de - - n'ye lyu -

<sup>27</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 330.

<sup>28</sup> A. Ostretsov, 'Shakh-Senem', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/2, 47.

21

bov' o - kri - li - - la dru -

22

go - - - go ko - nya.

Many reviewers hailed Glière's 'creative synthesis' a success. Georgy Khubov, for instance, considered *Shakh-Senem* to have 'organically combined authentic national features of Azerbaijani folk music with the principles of high [European] symphonic mastery'.<sup>29</sup> But it is evident even from the work's earliest reception that Glière's status as a Russian composer and his deference to nineteenth-century Orientalist tropes were perceived as barriers to the composer's synthesizing ambitions. Moreover, the musical devices Glière adopted to achieve these aims at best demonstrated a Western bias or at worst perpetuated lazy nineteenth-century stereotypes. When the work was performed at the Azerbaijani dekada in 1938 (to which I return in the final section of this chapter), these old wounds would be reopened. But before that, Glière would become involved in another dekada project, this time for Uzbekistan.

<sup>29</sup> Khubov, 'Shakh-Senem', *Pravda*, 8 April 1938, 4.

## The Uzbek Dekada and *Gyulsara*

**Box 3.1.** Principal productions of the Uzbek dekada, 21–30 May 1937.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
21, 22*, 26, 28	Reinhold Glière, <i>Gyulsara</i> (1936, rev. 1949)	Music drama
23, 24*, 25, 27	Viktor Uspensky and Georgy Mushel, <i>Farkhad i Shirin</i> (1936)	Music drama

\* Attended by Stalin.

When the Uzbek Department for Arts Affairs began preparing for the fourth dekada to be held in Moscow, a mere nine months before the time scheduled, the Uzbek State Theatre was understaffed and underfunded. The scale of the operation to rapidly professionalize Uzbek art was truly ambitious. A frantic campaign ensued to replenish the theatre, and to recruit musicians for the newly established Uzbek State Philharmonic orchestra. In September and October of 1936 over a thousand people were auditioned from the length and breadth of the country. An army of promising amateurs was plucked from work in collective farms and factories and marshalled to Tashkent where a rigorous training programme began.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the Graduate School of Music, which had been established in 1934, hurriedly had its status upgraded to a ‘conservatoire’ in 1936.<sup>31</sup> Having prepared two dekada works by May 1937, the Uzbeks had in nine months effectively achieved what had taken Kazakhstan three years.

The Uzbek Department of Arts Affairs invited Glière to Tashkent in late 1936, and the composer began work on a ‘music drama’ that September.<sup>32</sup> Glière’s new Uzbek work, *Gyulsara*, was based on a 1932 play by Komil Yashen. Originally titled *Ichkarida* (‘In the Women’s Quarters’) it had been first set to music by Mukhtar Ashrafi in 1933, then again by Tohtasīn Jalilov in 1935 for an ensemble of folk instruments.<sup>33</sup> Glière’s music drama focused on the eponymous *Gyulsara*, a young Uzbek Muslim woman frustrated by the

<sup>30</sup> M. Mukhamedov, ‘Kak mī gotovilis’ k dekade’, *Pravda*, 20 May 1937, 4.

<sup>31</sup> F. Karomatov, ‘Uzbekskaya muzīka’, in Keldīsh (ed.), *Muzīkal’naya entsiklopediya*, 6 vols (Moscow: Sovetskiy entsiklopediya, 1981), V: 687.

<sup>32</sup> S. Veksler, ‘Gliēr i uzbekskaya muzīkal’naya kul’tura’, in Bogdanov-Berezovskiy (ed.), *Reyngol’d Moritsevich Gliēr*, II: 184.

<sup>33</sup> Keldīsh (ed.), *Istoriya muzīki narodov SSSR*, II: 419. On Jalilov’s unsuccessful post-war opera *Takhir and Zukhra*, see Chapter 6.

social constrictions placed on her by Islamic society. Her husband Kadir, a handicraftsman for a silk-weaving artel, supports Gyulsara's decision to stop wearing the paranji, the thick horsehair veil traditionally worn by Uzbek Muslim women. But the couple are opposed by Gyulsara's father, Ibrahim, an 'illiterate and ignorant handicraftsman' controlled by the mullahs (clergy) and the corrupt kulak Badalbay. Ibrahim forcibly separates Gyulsara and Kadir. Trapped in her parents' home, Gyulsara begins to rebel against her father's control, cautiously supported by her mother Aysara. Driven to despair, and egged on by Badalbay and the mullahs, Ibrahim attacks and kills Aysara, but Gyulsara escapes. Reunited with her husband, Gyulsara casts off her veil, and joins the campaign for the emancipation of Uzbek women.<sup>34</sup>

In the original play the lead character is ultimately murdered by her father, but for the dekada the ending was deemed 'schematic', 'pessimistic', and failing to evoke socialist triumph, and it was decided that she should survive.<sup>35</sup> More seriously, however, officials declared the pre-existing music to be 'primitive', and so Glière was enlisted to prepare a new version. It seems that the new version was musically distinct from those of Ashrafi and Jalilov. Ahead of Glière's arrival, the Uzbek dekada committee assigned a composer to prepare a collection of traditional Uzbek tunes that could function as leitmotifs.<sup>36</sup>

The limited time the Uzbeks had had to prepare proved a hindrance. The music dramas presented at the festival were compiled and rehearsed in a matter of months. Glière had begun work on *Gyulsara* only eight months before the work would open the dekada. The competing music drama written for the festival, *Farkhad and Shirin*, opted for an ancient Uzbek folk tale.<sup>37</sup> This was a collaborative project forged in the spirit of 'collective creativity' and 'creative synthesis' between the composer Viktor Uspensky (1879–1949) and fresh Moscow Conservatoire graduate Georgy Mushel (1909–89). For

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<sup>34</sup> For a detailed summary, see Madzhidi (ed.), *Gyul'sara* [collection of essays about the music drama] (Moscow and Tashkent: Upravleniya po delam iskusstv pri SNK Uzbeksk. SSR, 1937).

<sup>35</sup> Boram Shin, 'National Form and Socialist Content: Soviet Modernization and Making of Uzbek National Opera between the 1920s and 1930s', *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 19/3 (2017), 425 (citing O'zMDA R-837/14/290, 35).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>37</sup> The premise of the opera focuses on the love between Chinese prince Farkhad and the Uzbek princess Shirin, whose happiness is foiled by the jealous Iranian Shah Khisrov.

this work, creative differences compounded the tight production timescale. In promotional materials for the festival, Uspensky defensively complained that the collaboration ‘put before the authors a pressing problem of stylistic, harmonic, and polyphonic order, the full development of which was difficult in view of an inadequate amount of time’.<sup>38</sup>

*Gyulsara* was unusual by virtue of its basis on a contemporary theme. This was the first dekada work to depict a contemporary Soviet topic (Brusilovsky’s *Zhalbīr* was the closest prior example, which had been based on events leading up to the Revolution). While works on contemporary topics were officially encouraged, most composers shied away from such projects. Such works perhaps ran the risk of comparison with Shostakovich’s ill-fated ballets, the most recent of which, *The Limpid Stream*, had been mauled in the press for its musical banality, lack of realism, and failure to use genuine folk themes.<sup>39</sup> Glière, however, at least had a positive track record in this regard: his 1927 ballet *The Red Poppy*, based on a revolutionary topic from recent Chinese history, had been a triumph and remained popular throughout the Stalin era and beyond.

The gender issue in Central Asia was made a defining theme at the dekada. *Pravda* was quick to explain how gender inequality had hindered Uzbek art, noting how in the past ‘women were forbidden to dance in the presence of men, and men, similarly, in the presence of women’.<sup>40</sup> Glière’s new music drama served as propaganda for the Stalinist campaigns to eradicate the veil in Central Asia, which had begun in the late 1920s. The campaign had sought to promote women’s rights amongst the Islamic territories of Central Asia by undermining religious traditions, especially by urging women to remove their veils.<sup>41</sup> In the mid-1920s the newly formed Uzbekistan was weakly differentiated culturally from its Central Asian neighbours. David Northrop has argued that Soviet discourse construed the Muslim Uzbek woman as the nation’s principal cultural

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<sup>38</sup> Viktor Uspensky, ‘Muzika “Farkhad i Shirin”’, *Farkhad i Shirin* [collection of essays about the music drama], Madzhidi (ed.) (Moscow and Tashkent: Upravleniya po delam iskusstv pri SNK Uzbeksk. SSR, 1937), 11. My thanks to Samuel Hodgkin for providing me with a copy of this source.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Baletnaya fal’sh’, *Pravda*, 6 February 1936, 3.

<sup>40</sup> A. Ayupov and I. Sultanov, ‘Na shirokom puti’, *Pravda*, 20 May 1937, 4.

<sup>41</sup> For the most exhaustive study of the campaign, see Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

signifier, and the female body became a politicized symbol of all that was wrong with Uzbekistan. Poor hygiene was deemed symptomatic of Uzbek ‘backwardness’, and Soviet authorities claimed that Uzbek women were emblematic of the dirt, disease, and ignorance of the Uzbek nation. It was argued that because women were compelled under religious law to marry early and retain domestic roles, they were consequently more prone to poor health and disease. The veil itself, the paranji, was thus decried not simply as a tool of religious enslavement, but also as dirty, unhygienic, and even causing ‘deviant’ sexual behaviours such as lesbianism.<sup>42</sup> Of course, the argument was built on weak and uninformed foundations. The paranji was hardly the primordial national symbol that the Soviet narrative implied, but an invention of the late nineteenth century. Even by 1917, they were mainly only worn by city-dwellers and the more affluent (see Figure 3.1 for an illustration of women wearing the paranji presented in dekada programming materials).<sup>43</sup> The politicization of the Uzbek veil resonated with wider attitudes about sexuality and gender roles in Soviet culture: since the 1920s sexual purity and hygiene had increasingly been connected with the ideals of ideological and moral purity.<sup>44</sup>

After the Revolution, women’s emancipation from the traditional family structure became a priority, and leading Soviet feminists such as Aleksandra Kollontai argued for the liberation of women from their traditional domestic role.<sup>45</sup> The ratification of the Soviet constitution in 1936 had enshrined gender equality into law, article 122 of which gave women equal rights with men ‘in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life’.<sup>46</sup> But the constitution also guaranteed some religious freedoms. Article 124, for instance, while insisting that the state and education system should be free from religious influence, promised all citizens ‘freedom of religious worship and freedom of

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<sup>42</sup> See Northrop, ‘Nationalizing Backwardness: Gender, Empire, and Uzbek Identity’, in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191–220.

<sup>43</sup> Northrop, *Veiled Empire*, 19.

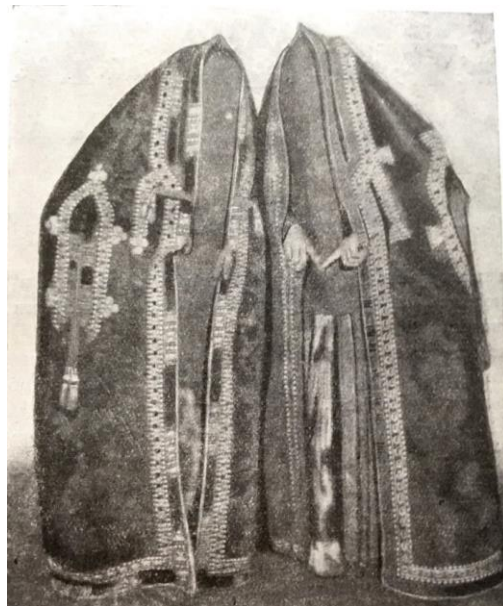
<sup>44</sup> Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 210–11.

<sup>45</sup> David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 91

<sup>46</sup> For the full English-language text of the constitution, see <<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/12/05.htm>> (accessed 9 August 2022). See also Alice Schuster, ‘Women’s Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality’, *Russian Review* 30/3 (1971), 260–67.

antireligious propaganda'. But such religious freedoms could not be at the expense of progressive Soviet values. Shortly before the dekada at which *Gyulsara* would receive its Moscow unveiling, an Uzbek newspaper published an article by Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaya entitled 'Promote Antireligious Propaganda'. She claimed that only development of the 'cultural front' and 'profound concern for the individual' could 'finally tear out the roots of religious beliefs'. For Krupskaya, the orthodox Islamic role of women and children was highly problematic, and she insisted that change had to come from those on the inside as much as through Soviet force.<sup>47</sup> *Gyulsara* was just such a piece of antireligious propaganda that could enthruse Uzbek Muslims to question entrenched gender roles. As antireligious propaganda, *Gyulsara* promoted the Stalinist enlightenment as the alternative to dogmatic religious practices. Although rejecting the veil meant freedom from the religious patriarchy for Gyulsara, it also symbolized her new status as a modern Uzbek woman, or 'new Soviet person' (*noviy sovetskiy chelovek*). The work conveys such ideas with little subtlety, for instance, in the 'Chorus of Emancipated Women' from Act 3 (Example 3.2). As the chorus passes in a militant rush of march rhythms and angular dotted and reverse-dotted rhythms, the text heralds the ecstasy of women's new industrial role in the factories and on the collective farms.

**Figure 3.1.** Uzbek women wearing the paranji in dekada promotional materials.



Source: Madzhidi (ed.), *Gyul'sara* (Moscow: Uzbek Department for Arts Affairs, 1937), 7.

<sup>47</sup> Krupskaya, 'Podnyat' antireligioznuyu propagandu', *Pravda Vostova*, 9 May 1937, 2.

Example 3.2. Glière, *Gyulsara*, act 3, scene 4, chorus.

Tempo di marcia ♩ = 108

S.  
A.

Pod gu - stoy chad - roy\_\_ dol-go dli-las' noch', ra-zo-rvi chad - ru,\_\_

vso pre - gra-dī proch! Trud i zna-niy luch\_\_ vam dolzh-nī po - moch!\_\_ Vam dolzh-nī po - moch!.

Vas te - per' vpe- ryod\_\_ Ok-tya - br ve-det. O, svo - bo dī doch!\_\_ Pol - no sle - zi lit'\_\_\_\_  
O, svo - bo dī doch!\_\_ Mo-zhno l' tech' sle - zam\_\_\_\_\_

pol - no gor - e dlit',\_\_ tī svo - bod-nīy mir na - u - chis' lyu - bit'.  
iz ve - syo-likh glaz?\_\_ Zhdut kol - kho - zi vas, zhdut za - vo - dī vas.

Beneath the thick veil lay enduring night,  
Tear off the veil, and all obstacles away!  
Work and knowledge must light your way.  
You must help. Move forward now.  
For the legacy of [the] October [Revolution].  
Oh, free daughter! No more shed tears and prolonged grief,  
You will learn to love this free world.  
Oh, free daughter! Do tears stream from your joyful eyes?  
The collective farms and factories await you.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Glière, *Gyul'sara: Otrivki iz uzbekskoy muzikal'noy dramy 'Gyul'sara'* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1937), 31–34.



Though not yet a fully-fledged opera, Glière's work was hailed as an 'early step towards the creation of Uzbek opera'.<sup>49</sup> As with Brusilovsky's dekada works for Kazakhstan, the inscription 'music drama' rather than 'opera' reflected the large amount of spoken dialogue on which the genre still relied. Georgy Khubov ruled that the continued reliance on dialogue was not itself problematic (noting Mozart and Weber as acceptable models). More seriously, Uzbek music was proving a victim of its own 'rapid growth', namely that while *Gyulsara* addressed important social issues and was suitably packed with folk tunes, it lacked the 'integrity and unity of musical and dramatic development'.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes it was the moralizing itself that got in the way of the action. In his address to a plenary discussion, Khubov maligned the long-windedness of the first two acts, where the 'striving for the authentic portrayal of national morals and customs is, in my opinion, too emphasized at the expense of the development of the action'.<sup>51</sup> In some ways, Khubov's caginess about 'rapid growth' was prescient. Writing with hindsight in 1989, for instance, the musicologist Nelli Shakhnazarova argued that the failure of the Stalinist national musical project had been its 'accelerated development', which had forced national musical traditions 'to "jump" over several stages of natural evolution'.<sup>52</sup>

While commentators naturally overlooked the ways in which 'antireligious propaganda' jarred with Soviet anticolonial ambitions, matters of aesthetics were debated with more nuance. One such issue was the relative importance of cultural preservation and modernization. The official position was presented as a sensible synthesis between two extremes: that traditional culture should either be completely protected from innovation or entirely supplanted by European influence. In official discourse, proponents of anything but a 'creative synthesis' between the two extremes were reduced to bourgeois or 'leftist' pantomime villains, as one *Pravda* editorial put it:

Bourgeois nationalists have made much noise about the allegedly disastrous consequences of Uzbek music being translated to European orchestration and harmonies. They have argued that the symphony orchestra would spoil the colour of national music. They wanted musical culture to remain at the point at which it froze many centuries ago.

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<sup>49</sup> Ayupov and Sultanov, 'Na shirokom puti', 4.

<sup>50</sup> Khubov, 'Muzikal'noye iskusstvo Uzbekistana', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1937/6, 12–13.

<sup>51</sup> RGALI 962/21/63, 6–7.

<sup>52</sup> Shakhnazarova, 'Problemī natsional'nogo i internatsional'nogo', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1989/5, 6.

There were also leftists, who demanded the immediate and decisive rejection of folk instruments.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, one reviewer for the Muzgiz editions of *Gyulsara* and *Farkhad and Shirin* disputed excessive cultural protectionism with a geographically confused metaphor:

With the ambitious path and lively development of music – national in form and socialist in content – the creation of Uzbek opera is thwarting the reactionary ‘theories’ [*teoriyam*] and ‘half-baked theories’ [*teoriyam*] of bourgeois nationalists, who would partition Uzbek music from the Europeans with a ‘[Great] Wall of China’.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, while public discourse was polarizing, it at least recognized the need for European integration to be shaped in a manner that was sensitive to cultural traditions. As I will discuss below, at the plenary discussion for the dekada the issue of how to integrate European styles with traditional Uzbek music was the subject of more in-depth debate.

But as with *Shakh-Senem*, Glière’s Uzbek work often seemed to place a heavier emphasis on European conventions than on national music. This becomes evident from a brief analysis of the work’s overture (for a tabulation of the form, see Table 3.1).<sup>55</sup> The overture is constructed primarily from materials that serve a leitmotivic function later in the work, developed within a large-scale sonata form. While the slow introduction seems to promise a Rossini-style ‘grand sonatina form’ overture omitting a development section, the extended overture largely evokes Beethoven and Germanic thinking in its musical rhetoric and sonata-overture structure.<sup>56</sup> Rather than representing a medley of themes from the opera, the overture rigorously develops a narrow selection of key dramatic themes to dialectical sonata principles (or ‘symphonized’ dramaturgy, as Soviet musicologists termed it after Asafiev). The overture begins with a menacing gesture (Example 3.3a) which, according to Glière’s own analysis, simultaneously represents ‘the oppressive

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<sup>53</sup> A. Ayupov and I. Sultanov, ‘Na shirokom puti’, *Pravda*, 20 May 1937, 4.

<sup>54</sup> I. Mart’inov ‘*Farkhad i Shirin i Gyul’sara*: Sborniki otrivki uzbekskikh muzikal’nikh dram’, *Sovetskaya muzika* (1938/1), 103.

<sup>55</sup> The score referred to in the preceding analysis is the concert version published by Muzgiz in 1938. Gulinskaya claims that this version was prepared in 1938, although Boris Yagolim notes that this version was more likely prepared for a performance on 14 May 1937 conducted by Aleksandr Gauk to promote the upcoming festival. Glière, *Uvertyura k muzikal’noy drame ‘Gyul’sara’: Partitura*, Ivan Shishov (ed.) (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1938); Gulinskaya, *Glière*, 149; Yagolim, *Biograficheskiy i notograficheskiy spravochnik* (Moscow: Memorial’niy kabinet R. M. Glièra, 2010), 84. See also M. Gafiz and A. Pint, ‘Uvertyura *Gyul’sara* vperviye ispolnena v Moskve’, *Pravda Vostoka*, 16 May 1937, 1.

<sup>56</sup> For a detailed discussion of nineteenth-century overture forms in historical perspective, see Stephen Vande Moortele, *The Romantic Overture and Musical Form from Rossini to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

motive of the Mosque', 'the conspiracy of those who oppose the emancipation of women', and Gyulsara's 'protest motive'.<sup>57</sup> It transparently evokes the strident, lower-brass theme of the Sultan from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade* (Example 3.3b), showing Glière's continued debt to kuchkist oriental signifiers. Incidentally, the overture to *Shakh-Senem* has equally clear references to *Sheherazade*, for example, the opening virtuosic clarinet motif over a quiet string tremolando (Example 3.3c/d).

**Table 3.1.** Glière, overture to *Gyulsara* (concert version), structural analysis.

	<i>exp.</i>				<i>dev.</i>	<i>recap.</i>				<i>coda</i>	
Intro	A	Tr	B <sup>1</sup>	B <sup>2</sup>	[A]	A	B <sup>2</sup>	B <sup>1</sup>			
Menace	'The people'		Gyulsara		Menace → A	'The people'	Gyulsara		Uyghur dance		
key	d		e		a	c → f → e <sup>b</sup>	d	d	d	g <sup>dorian</sup>	d
bar	1	50	114	132	152	181	296	327	367	379	427

**Example 3.3a.** Glière, Menace themes in the overture to *Gyulsara*, bb. 1–4 and 181–87.

**Risoluto** ♩ = 80

**Risoluto** ♩ = 80

**Example 3.3b.** Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sheherazade*, i, opening.

**Largo e maestoso** ♩ = 48

**G.P.**

<sup>57</sup> Glièr, 'O muzïke Gyl'sari', in Kiselyov (ed.), *Stat'i i vospominaniya*, 148.

**Example 3.3c.** Glière, *Shakh-Senem*, overture, opening.

**Allegro moderato**

Clarinet (A)  
 Horns (F) I, II  
 Harp I  
 Vln 2 div.  
 Vla div.

**Example 3.3d.** Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sheherazade*, ii, bb. 161–62.

**Moderato assai** ♩ = 72

Clarinet (A)  
 sfz p pizz.  
 ad lib. colla parte senza rit. ed accel.  
 a tempo  
 lento  
 accel.  
 poco rit.

The menace theme gives way to a slow and bleak introduction, quoting (according to Glière) a ‘classic Uzbek song’ reflecting the ‘experience of Gyulsara’.<sup>58</sup> The introduction again adopts kuchkist signifiers of the orient, such as chromatic trills and prominent use of the cor anglais.<sup>59</sup> The expansive introduction gradually builds towards an agonizing outburst and half cadence in D minor, establishing the tonality of the first subject. The rousing first subject, awash with syncopation and folksy plagal cadences, represents ‘the people’ in Glière’s analysis (Example 3.5).<sup>60</sup> The second-subject group comprises two

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of the oriental techniques used by the kuchka, see Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, Chapter 9, 152–85. Taruskin argues that the melodic pattern  $\flat 6-5$  was used by nineteenth-century Russian composers as an oriental signifier. Frolova-Walker, however, observes that this melodic pattern occurs just as frequently in non-oriental contexts, undermining the pattern’s oriental signification. Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 143–60.

<sup>60</sup> Glière, ‘O muzike Gyul’sari’, 147.

themes, both evoking the title character. The first theme of this group is again furnished with kuchkist orientalist tropes: another cor anglais solo, a Phrygian-mode melody, and a Borodinian, ethereal drone of open-fifths in the strings (Example 3.6). The theme later becomes the basis for Gyulsara's despair as she is separated from Kadir and imprisoned by her father ('My face has become stained with bitter saffron tears'). The second theme, shifting to the dominant minor, turns to fairytale-like Tchaikovskian nostalgia, with an undulating flute accompaniment, sweeping harp glissandi, and lush violin melodies.

**Example 3.5.** Glière, *Gyulsara*, overture, first subject theme ('the people'), bb. 64–78.

[Allegro ♩ = 176]

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system includes a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The third system features a mezzo-forte marcato (*f marc.*) dynamic and a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The score includes various musical notations such as chords, arpeggios, and dynamic markings.

**Example 3.6.** Glière, *Gyulsara*, overture, second subject theme, bb. 132–46.

Moderato ♩ = 72

Cor.  
ang. *mf* *espress.*

Hns

140

*cresc. poco a poco*

*dim.*

*p*

The development launches a fuller statement of the menace theme from the overture's opening (a recurring motive throughout the opera). After a stormy development, all the themes recapitulate conventionally on the tonic, though the order of the second subject group is reversed. The most jarring moment of structural surprise is an Uyghur<sup>61</sup> dance episode before the coda, representing 'the merriment and joy of the people' according to the composer.<sup>62</sup> This theme later becomes the basis of the chorus 'Greetings, Gyulsara' in the final act, where Gyulsara sings with the crowds in celebration about the joy of her new freedom (Example 3.7).<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The Uyghurs are a Turkic-speaking community occupying Central Asia and north-western China. They had their own Soviet-inspired opera tradition that was heavily influenced by Uzbekistan. See Rachel Harris, 'Music, Identity, and Representation: Ethnic Minority Music in Xinjiang, China', unpublished doctoral dissertation (School of Oriental and African Studies, 1998), 55.

<sup>62</sup> Glière, 'O muzıke *Gyul'sari*', 149.

<sup>63</sup> The Uyghur dance theme was especially positively received by critics. For instance: 'Rich Uzbek Theatre Art Presented to Applauding Moscow Audiences', *Moscow News*, 2 June 1937, 14.

Example 3.7. Glière, *Gyulsara*, act 4, scene 5, chorus 'Greetings, Gyulsara'.

**Ritmo ben marcato**

Zdra-vstvuy Gyul' sa - ra,

**Ritmo ben marcato**

4  
vse mī te-bya pri - vet-stvu-yem, vse mī gor-dim-sya sme - loy Gyul' sa'-roy, tī po-da - la pri-mer,

8<sup>ub</sup>  
slo-vom go - rya-chim, sme - lim du-shu svo-yu ras-krī - la i po-ka-za-la mno - gim

10  
**Gyul'sara**  
yas-niy i ver - niy put'. Zdrav-stvuy - te mo - i dru - z'ya

12

ra- dost' y serd-tse vo - shla po-lon tyul' pa-nov sad, vsyu-du u-lib - ki, smekh...

*Chorus:* Greetings, Gyulsara, we all welcome you.  
We are all proud of the brave Gyulsara, you set an example,  
With words of passion and bravery, her soul is now free,  
She has shown a clear and righteous path to many.

*Gyulsara:* Greetings, my friends, joy has entered my heart  
The garden is full of tulips, smiles and laughter are everywhere

Sympathetic Soviet composers such as Nikolai Myaskovsky and Boris Lyatoshinsky expressed approval for Glière's heavily Europeanized overture. Myaskovsky praised the fact that Glière had treated 'musical material not as an ethnographer, but more freely' creating a 'vivid work' to which the overture expressed 'a successful preface expressing all the main themes'.<sup>64</sup> Lyatoshinsky, by then a professor of composition at both the Kyiv and Moscow Conservatories, commented at a concert performance of the overture that 'the composer has managed to preserve the national sound with European orchestral instruments. The overture is an interesting, fresh, and vivid work'.<sup>65</sup> For most critics, however, the epic scale of the fifteen-minute overture grated against the humble music drama itself. Khubov complained that the overture was 'overloaded and long' and that 'in places the orchestration acquired 'a "pretty", that is to say "salon-European" colouring'.<sup>66</sup> Yevgeny Braudo agreed in his review.<sup>66</sup> that the overture was 'cumbersome' and 'a huge classical portal' that distracted from the modest folk basis of the work as a whole.<sup>67</sup> At a plenary discussion, Braudo added that *Gyulsara* exhibited folksongs in a disjointed array of uncohesive episodes, failing to exhibit 'musical creativity in the popular spirit, as was shown by Glinka'.<sup>68</sup> While praising Glière's orchestration and 'rich use of folk

<sup>64</sup> Myaskovskiy, 'Prekrasniye pesni i plyaski', *Pravda Vostoka*, 22 May 1937, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Garfiz and Pint, 'Uvertyura *Gyul'sara* v perviye ispolnana v Moskve', 1.

<sup>66</sup> Khubov, 'Muzikal'noye iskusstvo Uzbekistana', 13.

<sup>67</sup> Braudo, 'Gyul'sara', *Rabochaya Moskva*, 23 May 1937, 4.

<sup>68</sup> RGALI 962/21/63, 45.



melodies', the Bolshoi's chief ballet conductor Yury Fayer counted the overture as just one of 'several tedious passages which overburden the spectacle'.<sup>69</sup>

There is evidence that even before the reviews began to come in Glière was worried about how the work might be received. Khalima Nasirova, the soprano who performed the role of Gyulsara, recalled the composer joining her backstage after the dekada premiere of the work, where he could barely disguise his worry:

During the interval Reinhold Moritsevich joined us backstage, and the first word he spoke to us was 'duets'.

'The duets! Well done!' His usually somewhat stern face now shone with a kind, satisfied smile. 'The duets are excellent, and the choir is sounding good' he said, wearily sitting down in a chair. For a split second I saw fatigue in his eyes, but then it was gone, and before us was an energetic face once again.

'Reinhold Moritsevich, how is it in the hall? What is the public saying?'

'It is good, Khalima-khanum, it is good. You were excellent. Your singing was perfect'.

'And the music? Do they like the music?'

Glière hesitated. 'In general, the public is accepting, but to say anything concrete as yet is difficult'. He answered slowly, and I understood that he was worried. But suddenly his eyes shone. 'We have all done a great job. All of you were excellent'.<sup>70</sup>

At the plenary discussion, one of the main concerns was the Uzbeks' poor acting technique, which had also been a bugbear for the Kazakhs (see Chapter 2).

Kerzhentsev's deputy Yakov Boyarsky (who chaired the discussion) complained:

Comrades, we must say directly that some performers are simply hopeless actors. In *Gyulsara* it is perhaps passable since people perform [within] a familiar environment, but in *Farkhad and Shirin*, where one must transfer oneself either to Arabia or China, this lack of stage technique has a very strong effect. Take, for example, the workers' scene – such mass scenes are simply terrible: motionless people, even the imitation of labour is very elementary, very uninteresting.<sup>71</sup>

A more nuanced concern was how far European vocal technique should influence the development of Uzbek opera. One authority, the playwright and actor Manon Madzhidov-Uygur, argued that throat singing should be abandoned in favour of the European style, since ways could be found in the latter to replicate the traditional Uzbek timbre. He argued that Uzbek throat singing simply constituted bad technique, citing that singers often tended to lose their voice rapidly while performing.<sup>72</sup> Nasirova, who had studied European

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<sup>69</sup> Fayer, 'O Spektakle "Gyul'sara"', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 23 May 1937, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Nasirova, *Solntse nad Vostokom*, 215.

<sup>71</sup> RGALI 962/21/63, 79

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 74–75.

singing technique, argued that the wholesale application of the European style to Uzbek folksong risked distorting the character of the music and even the language itself.<sup>73</sup> Kerzhentsev, rounding up the discussion, admitted that there was no simple solution, but weighed in favour of introducing European vocal technique, but adapting it to preserve the 'guttural sounds' of the Uzbek language.<sup>74</sup>

The negative criticism did not stop the major Uzbek newspaper *Pravda Vostoka* publishing a feature declaring *Gyulsara* a resounding success. Among the coverage was a handful of positive remarks from major figures from the Moscow art world, including Nikolay Golovanov (the recently sacked conductor of the Bolshoi) and head of the Writers' Union Vladimir Stavsky.<sup>75</sup> The newspaper also aimed to show how the dekada success was trickling down to the masses. One selected letter from an ironworker proudly stated: 'The Uzbek dekada in Moscow has stirred up our creative amateur activity. Our musical circle now has a full-time director. We want to stage some scenes from *Gyulsara* and *Farkhad and Shirin* at our club'.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the hype in Uzbekistan, the official reception of *Gyulsara* was rather more cautious. Though considered by the Stalin Prize committee in 1941, it failed to qualify for an award. Collaborating with Talib Sadikov, Glière revised the work into a fully-fledged opera that was premiered in Tashkent in 1949, and in this version the work eventually gained a Stalin prize in 1951, though only scraping a third-class award.<sup>77</sup> It is difficult to gauge the true success of *Gyulsara* in Uzbekistan, since Soviet sources hardly gave space to dissent. According to the memoir of Khalima Nasirova, so many women were stirred by the work's emancipatory message that it was a running joke amongst theatre staff that a new stage curtain could have been stitched together from discarded veils left in the auditorium.<sup>78</sup> The musicologist Viktor Vinogradov recalled seeing *Gyulsara* in

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>75</sup> *Pravda Vostoka*, 23 May 1937, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Sadik Muratov, 'O nashikh artistakh govorit vsya Moskva', *Pravda Vostoka*, 29 May 1937, 3.

<sup>77</sup> See Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 49, 326. On the 1949 revision, see Yagolim, *Spravochnik*, 51; Ya. Pekker, *Uzbekskaya opera: Ot vozniknoveniya do kontsa shestidesyatikh godov XX veka*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1984 [1963]), 156.

<sup>78</sup> Nasirova, *Solntse nad Vostokom* (Moscow: Molodaya gravdiya, 1962), 206.

Tashkent in the 1930s, and was told by the theatre director that it was quite common for women to abandon their veils in the auditorium (especially when Nasirova played the title role).<sup>79</sup> It is hard to imagine, however, that *Gyulsara's* antireligious message encountered no resistance. Ultimately, *Gyulsara* soon left the repertoire, as much a failure as the anti-veil campaign itself. As Douglas Northrop has argued, the premise of the campaign was marred by a fundamental contradiction, namely that the veil was supposed to function both as a constructive symbol of Uzbek national identity as well as demarcating its backwardness. Moreover, while the emancipatory rhetoric of Soviet officials legitimized a project of cultural transformation in the name of anticolonialism, it imposed a regime that was far more drastically interventionist than anything the tsarist state had ever attempted. The campaign thus became a victim of its own contradictions and hypocrisies, and the *paranji* was still widely worn even into the 1960s.<sup>80</sup> *Gyulsara* had ultimately been a damp squib, and Glière had to pin his hopes on the Azerbaijani dekada the following year, which would stage the Moscow premiere of *Shakh-Senem*. But this, too, would not be a recipe for success.

### The Azerbaijani Dekada: Glière vs Hajibeyov

**Box 3.2.** Principal productions of the Azerbaijani dekada, 5–15 April 1938.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
5*, 6, 14*	Uzeir Hajibeyov, <i>Kyor-ogli</i> (1937)	Opera
7, 8, 13*	Reinhold Glière, <i>Shakh-Senem</i> (1927, rev. 1934)	Opera
9, 10*	Uzeir Hajibeyov, <i>Arshin mal alan</i> (1913)	Musical comedy
11, 12*	Abdul Mahomayev, <i>Nergiz</i> (1933, rev. 1938 by Reinhold Glière)	Opera
15*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

In April 1937, the new opera *Kyor-ogli* (The Blind Man's Son) by Uzeir Hajibeyov (1885–1948) was performed in Baku. During early performances of this work, the first full-scale

<sup>79</sup> Vinogradov, 'Oni bili pervimi', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1986/3, 78. Vinogradov expressed the same anecdote in 'Novoye v natsional'nom muzikal'nom teatre', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1941/5, 26.

<sup>80</sup> Northrop, 'Nationalizing Backwardness', esp. 205–14.

opera by an Azerbaijani composer, the prospect of organizing an Azerbaijani dekada in Moscow was first proposed. The dekada was scheduled for early April 1938, and four major works were placed in the running. Glière's *Shakh-Senem* was quickly proposed. Two works by Hajibeyov were also suggested: *Kyor-ogli* and the comic opera *Arshin mal alan*, which offered a satire on Azerbaijan's feudal customs. The final opera volunteered was *Nergiz* by the recently deceased composer Abdul Mahomayev (1885–1937), based on the struggle between peasants and the ruling aristocracy. Hajibeyov continued to work on fine-tuning his operas throughout preparations for the dekada. Meanwhile, Glière was invited back to Azerbaijan to assist with preparations, which included completely reorchestrating *Nergiz*. The Azerbaijani opera company also underwent a frantic recruitment drive, and the chorus was expanded from around 70 to 120.<sup>81</sup> In the run-up to the dekada, efforts were made to promote the forthcoming event in Moscow: articles promoting the festival began appearing in the press and Aleksandr Gauk conducted a concert performance of the overture to *Shakh-Senem*, as he had done with *Gyulsara*.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the rosy picture of dekada preparations painted in the press, arrangements proceeded chaotically. In a June 1937 meeting about plans for the dekada, one participant hopefully opined that *Nergiz* in particular represented a 'trump card' for the Azeris, since it addressed 'problems that neither Georgia nor Ukraine solved' at their dekada.<sup>83</sup> Yet the hopes placed in *Nergiz* were soon dashed. In October 1937, the KDI sent the former RAPMist composer-turned-music-journalist Aleksandr Shaverdyan to assess the dekada works. Shaverdyan found *Nergiz* the most concerning production, warning that 'there is a danger that the production will be of no artistic value'.<sup>84</sup> *Nergiz* continued to be beset by problems in the coming months. On 31 January 1938, a descendent of its composer delivered a speech expressing strong misgivings about the

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<sup>81</sup> Ismail Idayat-Zade, 'Kak mi gotovilis', *Pravda*, 2 April 1938, 4. Idayat-Zade directed productions of *Kyor-ogli* and *Arshin mal alan*. When the director of *Nergiz* was sacked for incompetence, Idayat-Zade also inherited responsibilities of its direction (RGALI 962/21/16, 30). On Glière's return to Azerbaijan, see Mamedova, 'Slovo o moyem druge', 253–54.

<sup>82</sup> 'K dekade azerbaidzhanskogo iskusstva', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/5, 87.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Isabelle Kaplan, 'The Art of Nation-Building: National Culture and Soviet Politics in Stalin-Era Azerbaijan and other Minority Republics' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 2017), 158.

<sup>84</sup> RGALI 962/21/14, 118.

new edition being prepared by Glière, Zulfugar Niyazi (conductor), and Sultan Dadashev (director). Incensed, the following day Glière wrote to the Azerbaijani arts commissar, Mirza Ibragimov. He noted that Mahomayev's heirs had expressed their confidence in the project in writing already, which had been a condition of Glière's acceptance. Thus, he not only took personal affront, but also expressed concerns about a conflict of interest, since the same descendent was apparently on the reviewing committee for the new production. He signed off his letter that 'the only way out of this situation is my departure, which I duly bring to your attention'.<sup>85</sup> It seems that Glière did not follow through on his threat to abandon the project, but problems persisted. According to a later report from Ibragimov, Dadashev had refused to make any corrections based on Shaverdyan's recommendations and was sacked from the project (a decision compounded by the fact that he frequently showed up to work drunk).<sup>86</sup>

The KDI also received a high volume of complaints from lower-level *dekadniki* about their superiors. Many such letters were sent direct to Stalin or Molotov. According to procedure, they were passed down the chain of command to the KDI. There is a smattering of such letters in the archives for most dekadas, usually expressing petty grievances about superiors or from those who felt that they had not received a sufficiently prestigious award. Complaints from the Azeris were so numerous, however, that they fill an entire file. The most serious allegations were of xenophobic attitudes to other nationalities, particularly Armenians, with whom Azerbaijan had long had a historically antagonistic relationship. One complaint noted that Azerbaijani authorities had forcibly removed Armenians from the orchestra and had gone out of their way to exclude Armenians more generally.<sup>87</sup> The musicologist Moisey Grinberg, who was tasked with sifting through the complaints, recommended further investigation of the 'many materials directly accusing the leadership of the Azerbaijani Department of Arts Affairs of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>86</sup> RGALI 962/21/12, 30.

<sup>87</sup> RGALI 962/21/16, 15.

nationalism', adding that 'I have reason to believe that all these statements reflect reality'.<sup>88</sup>

At the same time, the KDI was undergoing problems of its own. By the spring of 1937 questions were being asked about the soundness of Kerzhentsev's leadership.<sup>89</sup> On 17 January 1938, Zhdanov gave Kerzhentsev a humiliating and public dressing down, accusing him of various misdeeds, apparently including an attempt to disband the Department of National Cadres at the Moscow Conservatory, whose function was to train musicians from the republics.<sup>90</sup> Kerzhentsev was removed from the Committee, but escaped execution and lived out his career as an editor for Soviet Encyclopaedia. His deputies Yakov Boyarsky and Boris Shumyatsky were less fortunate. On 9 January *Pravda* ran a piece attacking Shumyatsky's poor record with Soviet cinematography, and he was arrested on the same day as Zhdanov's attack on Kerzhentsev for participating in a 'counter-revolutionary terrorist organization'.<sup>91</sup> Boyarsky had left the KDI in the summer of 1937 (at Kerzhentsev's request) to become director of the Moscow Arts Theatre, but was arrested and shot in 1940, appearing on the same execution list as Vsevolod Meyerhold.<sup>92</sup> Kerzhentsev was replaced by the thirty-two-year-old Aleksey Nazarov, who had previously headed *Pravda's* literature and art department. For his deputies, he appointed the theatre critic Aleksandr Solodovnikov and literature expert Mikhail Khrapchenko. Within a year, however, Nazarov had left the role and Khrapchenko rose to the leadership position. However, the ousting of Kerzhentsev introduced some younger blood into the Committee. Kerzhentsev, Boyarsky, and Shumyatsky had an average age of fifty-two, but now the Committee was run exclusively by people in their early thirties.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>89</sup> Simo Mikkonen, *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 363.

<sup>90</sup> 'Okonchaniye rechi deputata A. A. Zhdanova', *Pravda*, 18 January 1938, 3.

<sup>91</sup> G. Yermolayev, 'Chto tormozit razvitiye sovetского кино', *Pravda*, 9 January 1938, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muziki: Stalinskaya kul'turnaya revolyutsiya* (Moscow: Yuridicheskaya kniga, 1997), 260. A reproduction of the execution order appears on Boyarsky's Russian Wikipedia page: <[https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Боярский,\\_Яков\\_Осипович](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Боярский,_Яков_Осипович)> (accessed 9 August 2022).

Solodovnikov suggests in his memoir that what the new KDI lacked in managerial experience they made up for with chutzpah and youthful open-mindedness.<sup>93</sup>

The now traditional final reception at the Kremlin boasted some prestigious invitees; among representatives from the musical world were Glière, Myaskovsky, Aram Khachaturian, and the musicologist Boris Asafiev.<sup>94</sup> Nazarov spoke first, in his capacity as new KDI chairman, toasting the ‘talented and free’ Azerbaijani people, and outlining plans for *Kyor-ogli* to be performed at the Bolshoi the following season.<sup>95</sup> Hajibeyov also spoke, offering toasts to Stalin, Molotov, and the Azerbaijani people.<sup>96</sup> *Pravda* even ran laudatory comments from various Moscow celebrities. The illustrious Aleksey Stakhanov was interviewed, as he had been with previous dekadas, thanking the visitors for ‘bringing such pleasure to Muscovites’, and regretted the brevity of their visit. He went on: ‘I attended three performances: *Kyor-ogli*, *Arshin mal alan*, and *Nergiz* [*Shakh-Senem* is conspicuously absent]. Each time the curtain fell in the final act, it was a pity all was over: I wanted to keep listening to this wonderful music, watch the play of talented artists, and admire the beautiful scenes’.<sup>97</sup>

Hajibeyov, whose contributions seemed to outshine Glière’s, had also attempted to forge a creative synthesis between ‘the old and the new’ in his work,<sup>98</sup> and was later celebrated for his ‘artistic synthesis of the national and international’.<sup>99</sup> The plot for *Kyor-ogli* was based on an Azerbaijani folk legend.<sup>100</sup> Hajibeyov was particularly celebrated for his native credentials and was widely portrayed as heir to the Azerbaijani music tradition. Samuil Samosud, the Bolshoi’s eminently respected principal conductor, wrote that

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<sup>93</sup> Solodovnikov, ‘Mi bili molodi togda... (vospominaniya)’, in Yu. Ribakova and M. Selikh (eds), *Teatral’naya stranitsa: Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 189.

<sup>94</sup> RGALI 962/21/11, 17.

<sup>95</sup> The promised Bolshoi production of *Kyor-ogli* gradually stalled and was downgraded over the intervening years, eventually being completely axed. See Kaplan, ‘The Art of Nation Building’, 171–72.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Priyom v kremle uchastnikov dekadi azerbaydzhanskogo isskusstva’, *Pravda*, 18 April 1938, 1; see also *Sovetskoye Iskusstvo*, 18 April 1938, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Stakhanov, ‘Spasibo azerbaydzhanskomu narodu’, *Pravda*, 16 April 1938, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Uzeir Gadzhibekov, ‘V starom i novom Azerbaydzhane’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/2, 57–61.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Kaplan, ‘The Art of Nation Building’, 168 (citing Ye. Abasova and K. Kasimov (eds), *Iskusstvo Azerbaydzhana XII* (Baku: Izd. AN AzSSR, 1968), no page given).

<sup>100</sup> The plot, in summary: the despotic Hassan Khan blinds the old man Ali when he fails to bring him the best horse in the land. The remainder of the opera charts an ultimately successful rebellion against the Khan led by Ali’s son Rovshan

Hajibeyov was ‘alien to decadence and all the finery and sophistication of recent trends in the West. In his work, he follows in the footsteps of the great classics: Beethoven, Mozart, and Glinka’.<sup>101</sup> A public endorsement even came from Stalin himself. In a publicized conversation with the composer during the dekada he lauded *Kyor-ogli* for ‘taking issues in its basic plot that were important for the people: the struggle for land, and the struggle for liberation from oppression’.<sup>102</sup> Hajibeyov was awarded the Order of Lenin and People’s Artist of the USSR for his creative contribution to the dekada (in 1941, he would add a second-class Stalin Prize to his collection of awards for *Kyor-ogli*).<sup>103</sup>

Next to the perceived authenticity of Hajibeyov’s work, Glière’s excessively European lyricism became a problem. Khubov did not raise any overt criticism of *Shakh-Senem* in his *Pravda* review, but his extended report on the dekada operas for *Sovetskaya muzika* was tellingly devoted almost entirely to Hajibeyov’s *Kyor-ogli*, with Glière’s work barely meriting a mention.<sup>104</sup> Shaverdyan’s review was more forthright about the work’s flaws, namely that Glière’s excessively lyrical score came at the expense of the drama, and so the composer had failed to musically convey the dramatic potential of Lermontov’s version of the story.<sup>105</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that *Shakh-Senem* failed to inspire the public. By the time Stalin went to see Glière’s work on its third performance, it played to a hall that was barely a third full. The third production of *Kyor-ogli* the following night (Stalin’s second viewing of the work) still managed a respectable audience of over a thousand (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2.** Ticket allocations for productions at the 1938 Azerbaijani dekada.

Performance date	Production (* attended by Stalin)	Tickets allocated
15 April	Final concert*	924
14 April	<i>Kyor-ogli</i> *	1012
13 April	<i>Shakh-Senem</i> *	483
12 April	<i>Nergiz</i>	1406
11 April	<i>Nergiz</i> *	1424

<sup>101</sup> Samosud, ‘Talantliviy kompozitor’, *Izvestiya*, 18 April 1938, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Ashraf Abbasov, ‘Uzeir Gadzhibekov i ego opera Kyor-Ogli’, introductory essay to the published score: *Kyor-Ogli: Opera v pyati deystviyakh* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1952), 7 (citing ‘Za visovuyu ideynost’ sovetskogo iskusstva’, *Bol’shevik* 19–20/1944, 61).

<sup>103</sup> ‘Ukaz prezidiuma verzhovnogo soveta SSR’, *Pravda*, 18 April 1938.

<sup>104</sup> Khubov, ‘Iskusstvo azerbaydzhanskogo naroda’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/4, 5–22.

<sup>105</sup> Shaverdyan, ‘*Shakh-Senem*’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 8 April 1938, 3.



10 April	<i>Arshin mal alan</i>	1382
9 April	<i>Arshin mal alan</i>	1434
8 April	<i>Shakh-Senem</i>	1449
7 April	<i>Shakh-Senem</i>	1435
6 April	<i>Kyor-ogli*</i>	1432
5 April	<i>Kyor-ogli</i>	1361

Source: RGALI 962/21/1, 5<sup>v</sup>.

Glière was highly laden with awards already, and assigning a fitting award clearly proved problematic. On the reverse of an early but undated budget in the KDI archives, someone has idly scrawled ‘Glière = Peop[les’ Artist] of the USSR (already)’.<sup>106</sup> Several pages later there is a list of ten names destined for the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, the first three of which are Hajibeyov, the director Udayat-zade, and singer Mamedova, but no reference is made to Glière.<sup>107</sup> Later, a draft appears promising to bestow a whole string of awards on Hajibeyov, Glière, and Mamedova, though the latter two have been forcefully deleted in green pencil.<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, Glière was awarded the People’s Artist of the USSR (along with Mamedova and Hajibeyov, in addition to the latter’s Order of Lenin) while the family of Mahomayev were posthumously awarded 20,000 roubles for *Nergiz*.<sup>109</sup> But the investment extended well beyond individual remuneration, and the Politburo authorized substantial funds for the arts in Azerbaijan more broadly. Two days after the *dekada*, two resolutions were published under Molotov’s authorization. The first gave the usual promise to cover the travel and maintenance expenses of the *dekadniki* during their trip to Moscow, and an additional grant of two months’ salary for each participant.<sup>110</sup> But the second resolution promised truly transformative investment, including eight million roubles to renovate the opera house in Baku and a further three million to construct a ‘specially adapted dwelling house’ for artists

<sup>106</sup> RGALI 962/21/12, 21<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. An alternative undated draft of the awards that passes over Glière entirely may be seen at RGALI 962/21/11, 5–8.

<sup>108</sup> RGALI 962/21/12, 40.

<sup>109</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1190, 91–92.

<sup>110</sup> ‘O premirovaniye uchastnikov azerbaydzhanskoy dekadi’, *Izvestiya*, 18 April 1938, 1.

working in opera and ballet. The resolution also promised to increase the budget of the Azerbaijani branch of the Committee on Arts Affairs by two million roubles.<sup>111</sup>

On 19 April, four days after the dekada had ended, a plenary discussion was held in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi, chaired by Aleksey Nazarov. *Nergiz* was immediately dismissed for its 'absence of stylistically holistic design'. The report of the meeting praised both *Shakh-Senem* and *Kyor-ogli* for avoiding 'unnecessary operatic prettiness [*krasivost*] which sometimes tires the listener', instead engendering 'more genuine *narodnost*' and simplicity'. Khubov, ventured further criticism of Glière's work. He especially praised the dance numbers in *Kyor-ogli* which were 'organically woven into the action' and were 'built on a truly national basis', whereas the dances in *Shakh-Senem* felt contrived, embodying 'an artificial nature that gives the impression of plugged-in divertissement numbers'.<sup>112</sup> Vladimir Feré, whose co-authored operas for Kyrgyzstan would furnish the repertoire of the next dekada, suggested that Hajibeyov had succeeded in more naturally synthesizing national instruments into the European orchestra, in contrast to Glière's more 'mechanical' approach.<sup>113</sup> Nazarov ventured that the flaws in *Shakh-Senem* were more fundamental than most music critics had realized, suggesting that it pursued 'absolutely the wrong approach to the national theme'. While Nazarov took pains not to lay the blame entirely with Glière ('a very talented composer' who 'has done a great deal for our fraternal republics'), he regarded the opera as being encumbered by an exoticized, essentialized depiction of the East that reduced it to a mere 'geographical concept'. For Nazarov, time and patience were the only tools to ward off such mediocrity:

It would have been better not to rush, to sit for an extra year or two, to release a pleasant work, neither a candle to God nor a poker to the devil,<sup>114</sup> a real artistic work with a Soviet soul and Soviet way of doing things.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> 'O dopolnitel'niikh kapitalovlozhaniyakh po razvitiyu iskusstva azerbaydzhanskoy SSR', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 18 April 1938, 2.

<sup>112</sup> 'Itogi azerbaydzhanskogo dekadī', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 20 April 1938, 1. For the full transcript of the meeting, see RGALI 962/21/14.

<sup>113</sup> RGALI 962/21/14, 32–32<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>114</sup> The phrase in Russian refers to something amorphous, similar to the English phrase 'neither fish nor fowl'. Stalin had made repeated use of the phrase in a high-profile speech months earlier while reprimanding figures the Party prone to vacillation. It was perhaps the memory of this speech that placed put the phrase in Nazarov's mind, which he seems to misuse here. See Robert McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 208–09.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.

Nazarov was apparently also worried that the Azeris were likely to lose momentum once the dekada was over:

Successes are evident, but let us remember that this is only the beginning. Practice shows that when people perceive success as the crown of their achievement a decline is inevitable, they 'apply the brakes' and revert to bad habits. We hope this will not be the case in Azerbaijan. Create works that are even more perfect than those you have shown us, founded on true comradely Bolshevik self-criticism.<sup>116</sup>

Nazarov's worries were apparently well-founded. The first to raise the alarm was the Italian-trained opera star Murtuza Mamedov, known universally by his stage name Byul-Byul (from the Azeri for 'nightingale'). To general dismay, Byul-Byul had contracted flu shortly after arriving in Moscow for the dekada, and the KDI had frantically summoned three top laryngologists, who unanimously forbade him from performing. Ignoring the advice, he had powered through all his performances (to great acclaim) with his own unsanctioned remedy of tea, lemon, and cognac.<sup>117</sup> Four months after the dekada Byul-Byul took drastic action and took to the pages of *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* to vent his frustration about the stale progress of opera following the dekada. He complained that while 'the enthusiasm from the dekada in Moscow had not died down', no new operas were being produced. This was not the fault of artists and composers, according to Byul-Byul, but rather of the over-cautious approach of the Azerbaijani Committee on Arts Affairs. New operas such as Anton Mailyan's *Safa* were completed, but the Committee had apparently refused even to hear it. Additionally, the cast also wanted to mount more demanding Russian opera, such as *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *The Queen of Spades*. But progress was being obstructed by the 'inertia of the theatre leadership and [Azerbaijani] Committee on Arts Affairs'.<sup>118</sup> Byul-Byul's article created some scandal in Baku, and he was heaped with criticism in a two-day meeting at the opera house.<sup>119</sup> Some of the unwillingness to commit to new operas may have been

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<sup>116</sup> 'Itogi azerbaydzhanskogo dekadī', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 20 April 1938, 1.

<sup>117</sup> A. Mamedov, *Byul'-Byul'* (Baku: Azerbaydzhanskoye gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo, 1964), 56–57.

<sup>118</sup> Byul'-Byull, 'Yeshchyo raz ob azerbaydzhanskoy opere', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 24 August 1938, 3. Initially, his outlook had apparently been optimistic. Writing in the dekada's aftermath, he had stated that 'our task is to continue our work at the same fiery pace, fuelled by the giant impulse of performing for the great Stalin'. Byul'-Byul, 'V rodnoy Moskve', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 18 April 1938, 2.

<sup>119</sup> Mamedov, *Byul'-Byul'*, 66.

driven by an inclination to avoid controversy during the unfolding purges, especially since opera had proven to be a site of such political contention. More broadly, Byul-Byul's anecdote of dissipating excitement and stagnancy would become all too common with other dekadas, as will be revisited in later chapters.

Broadly speaking, Hajibeyov's contributions had been valued more highly than Glière's, and this trend has been borne out by the fortune of this repertoire since. Hajibeyov's works are still staged on a regular basis, especially in Azerbaijan, whilst *Shakh-Senem*, like *Gyulsara*, has fallen into obscurity. This was evident just a decade after the composer's death, by which time the musicologist Valerian Bogdanov-Berezovsky suggested that the 'innovative significance' of Glière's national operas was a matter of history, falling far short of the standards of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, for instance. However, Bogdanov-Berezovsky also admitted that the work played a vital role in the development of Azerbaijani art, and thus served as a bridge towards a pan-Soviet cultural vision.<sup>120</sup> If *Shakh-Senem* turned out to be a historical novelty, this was perhaps by design. Glière himself expressed reservations about his prerogative to compose a national opera for the Azeris. Byul-Byul recalled that when pressed about solving the problem of creating a 'national musical drama' Glière brushed such ambitions aside, insisting 'I do not intend to write an Azerbaijani opera that solves this problem. Let your own composers solve it'. Rather, he promised 'to do everything in my power to make my opera sound Azerbaijani and win recognition'.<sup>121</sup> Reiterating this in an interview for a German-language Moscow newspaper during the Azerbaijani dekada, Glière admitted:

I have always been of the opinion, and hold it to this day, that a truly national opera can only be written by a national composer who is unwaveringly connected to his people, who lives on his native soil, speaks his native language, and is familiar from an early age with national songs and melodies.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Bogdanov-Berezovskiy, 'Glièr i sovetskaya muzīkal'naya kul'tura', in Bogdanov-Berezovskiy (ed.) *Glièr: Stat'i, vospominaniya, material'i*, I: 25.

<sup>121</sup> Mamedon, *Byul'-Byul'*, 49.

<sup>122</sup> Jef. Berlinraut, 'Die Entstehung der Oper Schash-Senem [sic]: Gespräch mit R. Glier', *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung*, 4 April 1938, 3.

Two years later, Glière further clarified his position by suggesting that the phenomenon of operatic co-authorship should serve only as a springboard towards true national music making:

A few words about the national opera in the Central Asian republics. Its creation is still a matter for the future. It will be completed when highly skilled national composers emerge. The current cooperation between national composer-melodists and technically armed Russian composers is a transient phenomenon, connected with the pressing need for national opera houses to quickly create repertoire.<sup>123</sup>

That Glière conceived Russian influence as a transitional stepping-stone towards cultural autonomy complicates the notion that he was complicit in asserting Soviet colonial hegemony. Ultimately, the evidence presented in this chapter (building on those developed in Chapter 2) has shown that colonialist critiques of Glière were prevalent even in contemporary criticism, and that debates about cultural preservation and the merits and pitfalls of Europeanization were deeply rooted in public and private discussion about Glière's works. The entangling of Glière's music in such debates precipitated not only their problematic reception, but also their swift disappearance from the repertoire. Despite this public criticism of Glière's heavy-handed favouring of nineteenth-century European forms, some factors emerge that invite a more complex understanding of the construction of national identity in Glière's works. Far from positioning himself as a saviour in whom the destiny of national music lay (willingly or not), Glière instead sought to facilitate the 'progress' of national art towards self-sufficiency. On the one hand, works such as *Gyulsara* celebrate the Soviet colonialist projects in Central Asia, and the composer's national works betray a heavy-handed reliance on nineteenth-century orientalist signifiers. Indeed, some of these latter shortcomings were unpicked and derided by contemporary critics. But to suggest that the composer was driven by colonialist ambition is to overstep the mark, certainly if colonialism is limited to a cultural battleground on which colonial aggressors assert power over their subjects. Glière conceived his role as a facilitator, driven by a desire to develop local culture rather than to shape it to his own agenda. That the composer pursued national projects long before they became valuable political currency in the 1930s is testament to the fact that their attraction for him was personal

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<sup>123</sup> Glière, 'Za tvorcheskuyu družbu s teatrom', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1940/10, 24.

rather than political. In this regard, perhaps Stanley Dale Krebs, writing in 1970, was at least partially right (though for the wrong reasons) when he claimed that Glière was 'apolitical, but expedient and conservative in the cause of music'.<sup>124</sup> Krebs cites the composer's lack of participation in musical political groups in the early years of the Revolution as evidence of his apolitical position, but this fails to account for Glière's enthusiastic integration into the bureaucratic system later in life. He held senior positions within the bureaucracy, and was happy to put his name to articles such as 'Follow the Wisdom of the Party', where he praised the 1948 resolution and outlandishly claimed that Rimsky-Korsakov and Taneyev had presciently seen 'the futility of fashionable formalistic hobbies and actively fought against them'.<sup>125</sup> Whether he believed that he could bring about cultural transformation within or despite the system is uncertain, but his mission to do so is beyond doubt.

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<sup>124</sup> Stanley Dale Krebs, *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music* (London: Unwin, 1970), 72–73.

<sup>125</sup> See Gliér, 'Sledovat' mudrím ukazaniyam partii', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1952/2, 9.

## Chapter 4 – The East-West *Kulturnost* Imbalance: Kyrgyzstan and Armenia

In 1932, Narkompros published a list of the ninety-seven Soviet nationalities it regarded as ‘culturally backward’ (*kulturno-ostaliy*). In Soviet parlance, ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ had become a shorthand for geocultural status, rather than a literal geographical signifier. For instance, while Ukraine was considered a developed ‘Western’ nation, Crimean Tatars were among the culturally backward ‘Eastern’ nationalities. Among the dekada nations to make the list were all the Central Asian nations, as well as the Buryat-Mongolians. In the Caucasus, the historically Christian nations of Armenia and Georgia were both considered Western, while the predominantly Islamic Azerbaijan made it onto the ‘culturally backward’ list, a mark of Soviet religious prejudices discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup>

The need to distinguish ‘backward’ Eastern nationalities from more advanced Western ones stemmed from the importance that Soviet arts policy placed on the attainment of *kulturnost* (culturedness, or cultured behaviour). The term originated in the 1870s, evoked by the *narodniki* (populists) as a means for bringing mass awakening and liberalization from the tsarist regime. It saw a revival during the Soviet cultural revolution of the 1930s, where policies were introduced to tackle the *nekulturnost* (unculturedness) of the peasantry, which was perceived as a threat to public order. *Kulturnost* was foremost aspirational, mandating improvements in people’s manners, hygiene, education, literacy, and knowledge of communist ideology, as well as access to music, art, and literature. The growing emphasis on the great ‘classics’ of art and literature was notoriously dubbed the ‘great retreat’ by sociologist Nicholas Timasheff, and since the 1970s scholars have increasingly come to regard the cultural turn of the 1930s as part of a growing cultural middlebrow, or the triumph of ‘middle-class values’.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1930s in particular, festive

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<sup>1</sup> See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 56, 166–67.

<sup>2</sup> This argument was first posed in Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middle Class Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). For two studies that explore the construction of the middlebrow in musical socialist realism, see Philip Ross Bullock, ‘The Pushkin Anniversary of 1937 and Russian Art-Song in the Soviet Union’, *Slavonica* 13/1 (2007); 39–56, Pauline Fairclough, ‘Was Soviet Music Middlebrow? Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, Socialist

cultural milestones such as the Pushkin centenary or violinist David Oistrakh attaining first prize at an international competition became celebrated landmarks in the *kulturnost* narrative.<sup>3</sup>

As formerly 'bourgeois' forms such as opera were accorded higher currency in Soviet culture, the *dekadas* became the measure of cultural attainment between republics, thus exposing imbalances in the cultural hierarchy. The republics in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus had been developing musical traditions cast more squarely in the European mould since the late nineteenth century. As such, they inevitably produced results that were more impressive to Russian audiences than the lagging republics of Central Asia. This chapter explores this phenomenon as exhibited at the Kyrgyz (May/June 1939) and Armenian (October 1939) *dekadas*. I consider how this *kulturnost* imbalance affected the reception of the Russian-trained composers who produced music for these festivals. These included Vladimir Vlasov (1902–86), Vladimir Feré (1902–71) in Kyrgyzstan, and Khachaturian (1903–78) in Armenia.

### **Vlasov, Maldıbayev, and Feré in Kyrgyzstan**

The fortune of early Soviet Kyrgyz opera came to rest in the hands not of a lone visiting composer but rather with an unlikely collaborative trio: Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and their tunesmith Abdılās Maldıbayev. Vlasov and Feré's creative partnership emerged while they were both studying at the Moscow Conservatoire, both graduating in 1929. Vlasov studied the violin with Abram Yampolsky and Feré as a pianist with Aleksandr Goldenweiser. They both progressed into composition classes – Vlasov studying with Georgy Catoire and Feré with Nikolay Myaskovsky. Feré was among the first members of the student political organization *Prokoll* (Production Collective), which was founded in 1925. Frustrated by the narrow-minded academicism of the Moscow Conservatoire, *Prokoll* sought to produce music that was accessible to the masses, and especially

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Realism, and the Mass Listener in the 1930s', *Journal of Musicology* 35/3 (2018), 336–67. See also Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York: Dutton, 1946).

<sup>3</sup> See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 225.



promoted collective working practices. One of their most important works, the first 'Soviet oratorio' *Put Oktyabrya* (The Path to October, 1927), was a joint venture between eight composers. By the time Vlasov and Feré left Moscow in 1936 to work in Kyrgyzstan, their own creative partnership had already been firmly cemented in around 120 co-written pieces.<sup>4</sup> However, most of these were small-scale instrumental works, and the decision to relocate was at least partly driven by the frustration of not being able to break into more ambitious genres such as opera, which in Moscow was stonewalled by bureaucracy. Vlasov, who happened to share a train carriage with the novelist Vsevolod Ivanov on his first journey to Kyrgyzstan in August 1936, vented his frustration. According to Ivanov's memoirs:

[P]robably envying Kazakhstan and its theatrical successes in Moscow [i.e. its recent 1936 dekada], they [in Kyrgyzstan] decided to produce operas and ballets by 1938, when there would be a [Kyrgyz] theatre dekada.<sup>5</sup> [...] It must be a 'gold rush' for musicians now. The musician's wife does not approve of her husband's plans in the least, but the fellow hankers after glory – a perfectly legitimate desire – and he complains that operas, even after being passed [by the censor] and accepted [by the theatres] in Moscow, don't reach the stage until two or three years later, and he is tired of taking on random commissions [*khalturif*] and composing little songs.<sup>6</sup>

Vlasov also recalled this exchange, remembering in his own memoir the novelist's astonishment that he had been tasked with preparing three musical performances (including an opera) for a nation whose language he did not speak, and which currently had no orchestra, choir, soloists, or dancers. 'Well, you're quite the adventurer' was Ivanov's bemused response.<sup>7</sup> It so happened that three years later Ivanov was present to see the results of the project: the dekada performance of *Aychurek*. This was Vlasov and Feré's ambitious attempt at a full-scale Kyrgyz opera in its May 1939 dekada staging. When asked for comment, his public assessment of their achievement was circumspect: 'The performance of *Aychurek* with its colours, music, and the wholesome work of the talented Kyrgyz actors makes an excellent impression. But it

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<sup>4</sup> Viktor Vinogradov, *A. Maldibayey, V. Vlasov, i V. Fere* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1958), 28.

<sup>5</sup> The Kazakh dekada had occurred three months earlier, though the Kyrgyz dekada would arrive later than initially planned, in 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Vsevolod Ivanov, *Dnevnik* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, 2001), 28, entry of 13 August 1936. Cited in Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 163.

<sup>7</sup> Vlasov, 'Rozhdeniye muzikal'nogo teatra v Kirgizii', in Aziz Saliyev (ed.), *Iskusstvo i chelovek* (Frunze: Ilim, 1981), 58.

seems to me that the performance is somewhat overburdened with decorativeness and appearance'. While he expressed confidence in the Kyrgyz opera theatre to continue improving, he emphasized that there was still 'much work to be done'.<sup>8</sup>

But Vlasov and Feré's 1936 arrival coincided with pressures from local authorities to improve the standards of the theatres. In October of that year, the Kyrgyz Communist Party passed a resolution demanding improvement to theatres, specifically sanctioning 'music and dance in the best Kyrgyz tradition' for future performances. The resolution mandated that Kyrgyz theatre should look both Eastward and Westward: namely that theatre should be grounded in national sources, but that Kyrgyz theatre should look to Moscow for advanced theatrical forms and techniques.<sup>9</sup> Some of this pressure undoubtedly came from Moscow. When *Pravda* reported on 11 November 1936 that 'Comrade Stalin does not take his eyes off the Far East',<sup>10</sup> it voiced a commitment to levelling the cultural playing field, that *kulturnost* should be the pursuit of the periphery as much as it was for Moscow. Vlasov and Feré's presence, then, was hardly coincidental. They could provide the music and Russian expertise, as well as pledging to diligently master 'national material' as Brusilovsky had done for Kazakhstan, or in their own words, 'familiarize ourselves with the country, the idiosyncrasies of everyday life, its musical richness, and, most importantly, its people'.<sup>11</sup> They were not prepared to admit, even by 1939, that Kyrgyzstan was at a disadvantage compared to any other republic in the field of opera, contending that the 'path of opera development amongst the array of our Union's republics has been largely the same, regardless of differences in [their] historical past and the geographical and everyday characteristics of each nation'.<sup>12</sup> Vlasov and Feré were not the only Russians dispatched to Kyrgyzstan to assist with developing national culture ahead of the dekada. Amongst those also sent were the conductor Vasily Tselikovsky,

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<sup>8</sup> Ivanov, 'Zhelayu dal'neyshikh uspekhev', *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 29 May 1939, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ali Iğmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 105.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 200.

<sup>11</sup> Vlasov and Fere, 'Put' k pervoy kirgizskoy opere', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 21 May 1939, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Vlasov, Maldibayev, and Fere, 'Put' k sozdaniyu national'noy operi', in A. Rototayev (ed.), *Iskusstvo sovetsskoy Kirgizii* (Moscow and Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1939), 22. They justified their point by asserting that Ukraine and Azerbaijan had only just begun to produce their own 'true' operas.

choreographer Lev Lukin, and Maria Shostakovich (sister of the composer) who taught vocal technique.<sup>13</sup> Lukin was arrested and imprisoned in Frunze in 1938 as an ‘enemy of the people’, and was only released five days before the *dekada* began.<sup>14</sup>

Vlasov and Feré’s remit extended well beyond the mere production of operas. The announcement of their arrival in the Kyrgyz press stated that ‘in addition to their creative work’ they would be expected to ‘direct the entire musical work of the [Kyrgyz] republic’.<sup>15</sup> The task was certainly formidable, but as Vlasov had confided to Ivanov, the relocation had sound career-developing potential. Indeed, to some overworked urbanites Vlasov and Feré’s escape to the periphery was cause for envy. The Ukrainian soprano Zoia Haidai, who kept a friendly correspondence with Vlasov, wrote to him three months into his relocation: ‘I sincerely wish you the best in writing your [music drama] *The Golden Maiden* [*Altin kiz*]. I do so envy you seeing wonderful new places, new people, and the fabulous Tian Shan [mountains]. I would not mind being there myself’.<sup>16</sup>

Soon after arriving in Kyrgyzstan, Vlasov and Feré were introduced to their long-term collaborator and future melodist Abdīlas Maldībayev. Born in 1906, Maldībayev and his family had fled persecution by the local government to China, where they lived in poverty. After 1917 his family returned to the Kyrgyz region, and benefiting from Soviet education reforms, he entered a village school in 1921. In 1923 he travelled to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan and was accepted onto the preparatory course at the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Institute for Education, where he began participating in music and drama. In 1926 he entered the Music and Drama Studio and gradually became involved with performances, plays, and concerts. A year later he visited Moscow, where he saw his first opera, *Eugene Onegin*, at the Bolshoi Theatre. Inspired, Maldībayev even tried (and failed dismally, by his own

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<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Nevezhin, *Zastol’ya Iosifa Stalina: Bol’shiye kremlevskiye priyomī* (Moscow: Noviy Khronograf, 2011), 118; Andrey Kuznetsov, *Sayra Kiizbayeva: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestvo* (Bishkek: Llim, 1994), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Nevezhin, *Zastol’ya*, 118, citing Georgiy Bakhtarov, *Zapiski aktyora: genii i podletsī* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002), 85–86.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Kompozitorī Vlasov i Fere vo Frunze’, *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 12 September 1936, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of 8 November 1936. Zoya Gayday [Haidai], ‘Seychas, kak i vseгда, s golovoy v rabote’ [Letters to Vladimir Vlasov], *Sovetskaya muzika* 1982/11, 100–103. Haidai also apparently maintained some strained but good-humoured correspondence with Feré. On 5 May 1937 she wrote to Vlasov ‘I’m a great pig [*bol’shaya svin’ya*] in Feré’s eyes, but I’ll beg his forgiveness and he can’t stay angry with me. The fact is that I am so overloaded with work I simply cannot sit down and focus on his two songs he sent me’. *Ibid.*, 102–03.

admission) to write a Kyrgyz opera of his own.<sup>17</sup> While Maldibayev eventually became part of a composing trio with Vlasov and Feré, his role as a composer was often downplayed. In one account of the three dekada works, Maldibayev is described primarily as a singer who was ‘also a famous composer in Kyrgyzstan of many extraordinary popular folksongs’, and who ‘assisted Feré and Vlasov in co-authoring music for *Adzhal Orduna* and *Aychurek*’. In the same account, his small role in *Altin kiz*, discussed below, is ignored completely.<sup>18</sup> Maldibayev’s limited musical training meant that his input could only be superficial, and he himself was frank about this fact: ‘My work with Vlasov and Feré has taught me much. I want to learn; I want to master music theory, to take courses in composition, orchestration, and so on’.<sup>19</sup> Maldibayev got his wish and attended the Moscow Conservatoire in the 1940s, becoming a reportedly proficient lyric tenor and a significant cultural figure on his return to Kyrgyzstan.<sup>20</sup>

After their relocation, Vlasov and Feré began work on the music drama *Altin kiz* (The Golden Maiden) which premiered on 12 May 1937. Following the example of Brusilovsky and Glière, Vlasov and Feré set out to ‘preserve the structural features of Kyrgyz folk music [...] and at the same time raise it to the level of European art music’.<sup>21</sup> Despite their claim that in *Altin kiz* ‘much work on the selection of Kyrgyz folk tunes was carried out by Abdilas Maldibayev’, their new collaborator only actually supplied two melodies.<sup>22</sup> One number for which Maldibayev supplied the tune is the final chorus (Example 4.1), which took the form of the ever-fashionable Stalin ode. Yet the simplicity of the vocal writing, entirely in unison with a heavily doubled accompaniment, betrays the limited vocal ability of the forces at Vlasov and Feré’s disposal, limitations that would invoke criticism at the dekada as had been the case with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. True to their word, Vlasov and Feré’s music from time to time eschews Western tonal

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<sup>17</sup> Abdilas Maldibayev, ‘Moy tvorcheskii put’’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 6 June 1939, 2.

<sup>18</sup> M. Grinberg, ‘Tri spektaklya’, *Moskovskiy Bol’shevik*, 27 May 1939, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Maldibayev, ‘Tvorcheskii put’’, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Vinogradov, *Maldibayev, Vlasov, Fere*, 19–21; ‘Maldibayev, Abdilas’, in Yuiy Keldish (ed.) *Muzikal’naya éntsiklopediya*, 3 vols (Moscow: Sovetskii éntsiklopediya/Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973–1982), III: 413.

<sup>21</sup> Vlasov and Fere, ‘Put’ k pervoy kirgizskoy opera’, 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. See also Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 418.

norms, for example in the nonfunctional use of Neapolitan chords (on the word ‘Stalin’ in bar 6), supplying a jarring folksy inflection.

**Example 4.1.** Vlasov and Feré, *Altin kiz*, final chorus.

**Moderato**

Rod - noy, Sta-lin nash rod-noy, scha-st'ye

8  
k nam pri-shlo s to-boy, ras tsve-ta-yet na-sha zhizn', kak pre-kras-niy sad ves - noy.

Stalin is our kinsman. You have given us happiness.  
Our life flourishes like a beautiful spring garden.

A few weeks after the Kyrgyz premiere of *Altin kiz*, Vlasov and Fere took the score to Moscow, where on 1 June it received an audition at the offices of Muzgiz before an invited audience of composers, musicologists, and critics. Their reception was apparently favourable, and Moisey Grinberg (then director of Muzgiz) declared that it ‘may well be shown at the upcoming Kyrgyz dekada’ with the proviso that the composers ‘refine the libretto and certain musical passages somewhat’.<sup>23</sup> A week after the audition, Vlasov and Feré were summoned to a meeting with Kerzhentsev at the KDI, where they reported on the state of Kyrgyz music.<sup>24</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, some of the intelligentsia considered Vlasov and Feré to have not gone far enough in delving into European trends. One report praised their ‘authentic’ portrayal of Kyrgyz folksong, without subjecting it to ‘false stylization’. They had, however, ‘made insufficient use of elements of symphonism and polyphonic combinations, usually employed abundantly by artists from their musical palettes’. The

<sup>23</sup> ‘Pervaya kirgizskaya opera Altin kiz’, *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 4 June 1937, 3.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Muzika Altin-Kiz v Moskve’, *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 14 June 1937, 4. The KDI meeting occurred on 8 June.

article concluded that ‘we have the right to expect still greater creative efforts from our composers’.<sup>25</sup>

*Altin kiz* was succeeded the following year by *Adzhal orduna* (Not Death, But Life), first shown on 26 March 1938.<sup>26</sup> Here Maldibayev was credited as a composer alongside Vlasov and Feré. The backdrop of the work is the same 1916 Central Asian revolt as depicted in Brusilovsky’s *Zhalbir* (see Chapter 2), sparked by the Tsarist attempt during the First World War to conscript previously exempt Muslims from Turkestan to the Eastern Front. In the opera, oppressed by the heavily armed Tsarist troops, many of the locals are shown fleeing to China, though a small faction fights back under the leadership of their hero Iskender. The work closes with the joyful Kyrgyz returning to their homeland at the news of the October Revolution.<sup>27</sup> Musically, the work shows some signs of growing proficiency at the Kyrgyz Music Theatre. The choruses are marginally more complex, often appearing in two contrapuntally independent parts.

In May 1939, Vlasov, Maldibayev, and Feré finally managed to transcend music drama and produce a full-blown opera, *Aychurek* (Moon Beauty), which was prepared for performance just in time for the dekada deadline.<sup>28</sup> Maldibayev’s contribution was now far greater, personally claiming a stake in over ninety melodies.<sup>29</sup> The opera is derived from an episode in the Kyrgyz epic poem *Manas*, on which Vlasov and Feré would write another opera in 1946. By that time, the composing duo had acquired such status that the 1946 production of *Manas* was the most expensive Soviet opera produced to date, costing 1.5 million roubles. By comparison, the epic Bolshoi production of *Boris Godunov*

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<sup>25</sup> M. Mikhailov, ‘Kirgizskaya muzika’, *Sovetskaya Kirgiziya*, 16 January 1938, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Keldish, *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 450.

<sup>27</sup> For a summary, see Vladimir Fere and Vladimir Vlasov, *Adzhal orduna: Otrivki iz kirgizskoy operi* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1939), 2.

<sup>28</sup> The plot, in essence: The warriors Toltoy and Chinkodzho demand that Akhun Kahn break off his daughter Aychurek’s engagement to Sametey, the son of the warrior Manas. Wishing to save her father’s kingdom from total defeat Aychurek agrees to marry Toltoy, but buying for time, she requests forty days to prepare for the wedding. Meanwhile, she transforms herself into a swan, travels to Sametey’s kingdom and abducts her fiancé’s prized white falcon. Sametey goes in search of his falcon, discovers Aychurek, and hearing of her plight defeats Toltoy and Chinkodzho. Akun Khan holds a great feast in honour of the reunited couple. For a summary, see Fere and Vlasov, *Ay-churek* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1958), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Moisenko, *Realist Music: 25 Soviet Composers* (London: Meridian, 1949), 142.

mounted that same year cost around 1.1 million roubles.<sup>30</sup> In the three years that the composers had spent in Kyrgyzstan, the expansion of the opera company by 1939 was impressive. In the 1936/37 season that had seen the premiere of *Altin kiz*, the company had an orchestra of nineteen, a chorus of twenty-seven, and a ballet troupe of just six. On the eve of the dekada, these numbers had swelled to forty-five, eighty, and seventy respectively.<sup>31</sup>

Marina Frolova-Walker sees *Aychurek* as the continuation of all the most banal aspects of Russian orientalism à la Balakirev and Rimsky-Korsakov. For instance, she considers Vlasov and Feré's obsessive doubling of melodies in fourths as an arbitrary rejection of Western norms, whilst conversely sudden outbursts of Western-style harmonies appear contrived.<sup>32</sup> She also suggests that the musical weaknesses are symptomatic of a 'hurried cultivation of an externally formulated Soviet-style nationalism within the ecology of equally artificial nation-states'.<sup>33</sup> That Vlasov and Feré's early works reduced national features to such clumsy caricatures was accepted by Soviet commentators even by the 1950s. Viktor Vinogradov admitted in his sympathetic biography that:

The creative work of Vlasov and Feré testifies to a thoughtful attitude towards national form. Of course, they have also had setbacks, sometimes showing excessive enthusiasm for certain techniques. For example, in compositions on Kazakh and Kyrgyz themes they clearly exaggerated the role of the fourth and fifth. (Who has not thus sinned!?).<sup>34</sup>

Vinogradov's last remark is in reference to the fact that many Russian composers who composed music in the Central Asian republics tended to overhype such techniques, often vexing local musicians. Elsewhere, Vinogradov noted the same problems had emerged in Tajikistan:

Some [Russian composers] imagine that the national form of, say, Tajik music is exhausted by the combination of quartal and quintal harmonies, quartal parallelisms in polyphony, and

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<sup>30</sup> See Yekaterina Vlasova, *1948 god v sovetskoy muzike: Dokumentirovannoye issledovaniye* (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2010), 216.

<sup>31</sup> Vasilii Tselikovskiy and Amankul Kittubayev, 'Kirgizskoy gosudarstvenniy muzikal'no-dramaticheskoy teatr', in Rototayev (ed.), *Iskusstvo sovetskoy Kirgizii*, 14–16.

<sup>32</sup> Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form and Socialist in Content": Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/2 (1998), 349–52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 351

<sup>34</sup> Vinogradov, *Maldibayev, Vlasov, Feré*, 29. Vinogradov's relationship with Vlasov and Feré went back to their student days. He had been Feré's classmate in Catoire's composition classes and a fellow member of Prokoll. See his reminiscences in Vinogradov, 'Vstrechi i razmishleniya', in Marina Rakhmanova (ed.) *Shostakovich – Urtext* (Moscow: GTsMMK, 2006), 41.

the use of extensive seconds in melodies. In Tajikistan, the term ‘correct music’ is even in common use, which refers to works based on such a one-sided and limited understanding of national form.<sup>35</sup>

And so, while adopting some lazy stereotypes in their rush to produce Kyrgyz works for the dekada deadline, such oversights had no major bearing on Vlasov and Feré’s success either in the short or long term. They went on to further successes in Kyrgyzstan, where they were eventually perceived to have ironed out such errors perpetrated by younger composers. Such problems also failed to curtail their success at the dekada. As I explore in greater depth below, while many critics recognized that the works were hardly perfect, Vlasov and Feré’s ventures were accepted as a promising step towards a European-style school of national Kyrgyz music.

## The Kyrgyz Dekada

**Box 4.1.** Principal productions of the Kyrgyz dekada, 26 May – 4 June 1939.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
26*, 27, 30, 3	Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and Abdilas Maldibayev, <i>Aychurek</i> [The Lunar Beauty] (1939)	Opera
28, 29	Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and Abdilas Maldibayev, <i>Adzhal orduna</i> [Not Death, but Life] (1938)	Music drama
31*	Vlasov and Feré, <i>Altin kiz</i> [The Golden Maiden] (1937)	Music drama
4*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

With three established musical productions well under way, the Kyrgyz theatre turned towards preparations for its dekada. To assert their presence in Moscow, and perhaps to take stock of the competition, the Kyrgyz sent a delegation of representatives to the previous Azerbaijani dekada in 1938, though this was apparently not a diplomatic success. Feré, who seldom shied from political confrontation, complained at a public meeting that ‘the Kyrgyz Republic has followed the [Azerbaijani] dekada with rapt attention, and dispatched a delegation to greet you here at the dekada. I am sorry to say

<sup>35</sup> Vinogradov, ‘Tvorchestvo kompozitorov respubliki Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana’, in Vera Vasina-Grossman and Moisey Grinberg (eds), *Sovetskaya muzika: Teoreticheskiye i kriticheskiye stat’i* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1954), 457.



that the reception from the Committee on Arts Affairs has been distinctly unwelcoming'.<sup>36</sup>

The planning process for the Kyrgyz dekada was closely supervised by the KDI in Moscow. Vlasov recalled the race to 'refine and improve' *Altin kiz* and *Adzhal orduna* and to prepare understudies. The pressure from Moscow was relentless:

The Committee on Arts Affairs in Moscow asked if we would have time to fulfil all requirements by the appointed date and whether our performances would be worthy of showing to Muscovites and the government. In Frunze we were inundated by visits from Moscow by directors, critics, artists and representatives of the Committee to whom we showed and discussed our performances.<sup>37</sup>

Weeks before the dekada was scheduled, Mikhail Khrapchenko, who had by then replaced the short-lived Nazarov as KDI chairman, was still receiving reports about problems with the Kyrgyz dekada works. A report from late March lamented that *Altin-kiz* was still hampered by weaknesses in its libretto and production, as well as 'ornamental and shambolic' scenery.<sup>38</sup> Suitably concerned, the Committee waited until the last possible moment to have plans for the dekada ratified by the Politburo. Though the dekada was due to begin towards the end of May, Khrapchenko only wrote to Stalin and Molotov on 25 April to ask permission to hold the dekada and to approve the number of participants at 550, a request that was granted a week later.<sup>39</sup> Yet tensions were running high amongst Kyrgyz institutions as well. A day before the Kyrgyz delegation's planned departure for Moscow, thirteen of the thirty-nine members of the orchestra were sacked without warning. So severe was the scandal that an official urgent appeal was made to Stalin himself.<sup>40</sup>

The Kyrgyz artists arrived at Moscow's Kazansky railway station on 15 May, eleven days before the dekada was due to start. The arrival was greeted with the usual fanfare. Invitations had been sent to all Moscow theatres, requesting representatives to

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<sup>36</sup> RGALI 962/21/14, 13v. Feré had cultivated aggressive political oratory skills from his student days as a member of *Prokoll*, whose frequent speeches were as assertive as they were polemical. See Vlasova, *1948 god*, 128.

<sup>37</sup> Vlasov, 'Rozhdeniye muzikal'nogo teatra v Kirgizii', 75.

<sup>38</sup> RGALI 962/21/41, 99.

<sup>39</sup> Nevezhin, *Zastolya Stalina*, 119, citing RGASPI 17/3/1009, 22 and 17/163/1224, 74.

<sup>40</sup> As was the case with most overambitious pleas to Stalin, the request was redirected down the chain of command and passed to the KDI. The 'urgent' telegram to Stalin reads: 'People's moral sense of great injustice is understandable[,] having been preparing for the dekada then ousted on the eve of departure STOP [T]he inability to immediately resolve the matter has caused an immediate appeal to you STOP'. RGALI 962/21/41, 15.

welcome the Kyrgyz artists.<sup>41</sup> *Pravda* dedicated a full-page spread to the arrival, including description of the repertoire to be performed and interviews with Maldibayev and other artists and singers.<sup>42</sup> The public prestige of the dekada was further reinforced by endorsements from Moscow celebrities. Aleksey Stakhanov was again sought for comment as he had been for Azerbaijan, along with the scarcely less famed female pilot Valentina Grizodubova, who expressed her admiration for *Aychurek*. Such figures were evidently sought for their fame rather than for their musical insight. The renowned actress Aleksandra Yablochkina, apparently out of her depth when discussing opera, offered rather flimsily: 'I am not an expert in the sphere of vocal technique, but in my opinion, the female voices were more interesting than the male ones'.<sup>43</sup> Stalin also maintained his customarily high public profile. Accompanied by various members of the Politburo, he attended all dekada productions save for *Adzhal orduna*.<sup>44</sup>

Reinhold Glière praised the authenticity of Vlasov and Feré's music, admiring how they 'managed to sensitively capture the most characteristic intonations and modal nature of Kyrgyz melos'.<sup>45</sup> This was gracious indeed, given that Feré had publicly criticized Glière's 'mechanical' orchestration in *Shakh-Senem* and *Gyulsara* at the previous dekada (see Chapter 3). Vinogradov praised *Altin kiz* for its refreshing simplicity. The occasionally excessive dependence on unadulterated folksongs was forgiven in view of the 'creative and pedagogical considerations' of the composers. For Vinogradov, the overall impression of the work was 'like an album of folkloric paintings, only lightly embellished by the careful brushstrokes of the composers'.<sup>46</sup> Although the quality of the music was poor by comparison with the Bolshoi's usual fare, most critics reviewed them favourably. Sometimes apparent weaknesses were rebranded as features for admiration, if often in somewhat patronizing terms. For example, Aleksandr Shaverdyan's interpreted *Adzhal orduna*'s musical weaknesses as quaint, folksy idiosyncrasy:

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 93.

<sup>42</sup> 'Artisti schastlivogo kirgizskogo naroda' *Pravda*, 16 May 1939, 4.

<sup>43</sup> 'Zriteli o spektakle *Aychurek*', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 27 May 1939, 3.

<sup>44</sup> RGASPI 558/11/1479, 106–09. See also *Pravda*, 27 May 1939, 1; 1 June 1939, 2; and 6 June 1939, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Vinogradov, *Vlasov, Maldibayev, Fere*, 38, citing *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 30 May 1939.

<sup>46</sup> Vinogradov, 'Altin kiz', *Izvestiya*, 1 June 1939, 5.

In *Adzhal Orduna* the richness of folk music is not fully developed. The predominance of small, underdeveloped forms, internally unconnected, causes some raggedness in the musical fabric. The music lacks diversity, richness of thought, or vivid contrast. At the same time, the idea of the work requires this, and the boldness of Kyrgyz folk art allows for it.<sup>47</sup>

However, even in the case of the showpiece *Aychurek*, not all were so convinced by its musical value. The use of folksong failed to impress the noted composer Yuriy Shaporin, who refused to let pass the disjointedness that Shaverdyan had cautiously praised:

Especially interesting are the attempts of Vlasov and Feré to create harmonies arising from the characteristics of Kyrgyz folksong. But its richest possibilities are not always realized in this regard. In places the music sounds naturalistic and primitive ([for instance in] the battle scene). There is no widespread symphonic development in the opera, though the musical material would in many cases have allowed for it.<sup>48</sup>

Others recognized greater musical weaknesses in the earlier music dramas but appreciated the increasing musical complexity from the early *Altin kiz* to the most recent *Aychurek*, accepting them as part of an advancing creative evolution. For example, the ex-RAPMist critic Semyon Korev noted:

The music of Vlasov, Feré, and Moldibayev [sic] is melodious and expressive. Unlike *Aychurek* [...] *Adzhal orduna* lacks the continuity of musical development, a leitmotiv system, or profound symphonic development. Instead, disjunct musical and dramatic episodes alternate between scenes of dialogue, either against an orchestral background or without accompaniment. *Aychurek's* music is more significant and diverse, and displays more experience and mastery. But even in *Adzhal orduna*, the music is composed with considerable talent, melodic brightness, and captivating dramatic richness.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the overall kindness of the critics, as with the other Central-Asian republics, elements of Kyrgyz music were found wanting. After the dekada a public letter was published in *Izvestiya*, signed by twenty senior figures from the Kyrgyz artistic sphere, including Vlasov, Feré, and Maldibayev. The letter began:

We have been preparing for the dekada for a long time. Moscow has greeted us warmly, appreciated our work, and, like an older brother, helped us understand our shortcomings. Critical remarks from the Bolshevik press, comments from artists, and a broad discussion about the path of Kyrgyzstan's artistic development have been a great learning experience, helping and inspiring us to persevere with our struggle.<sup>50</sup>

The letter also admitted that weakness in vocal technique were the gravest hindrance (as it had been with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan before them). While some rectifying measures had been established, such as sending musicians to train in Moscow and Leningrad, the letter conceded that Kyrgyzstan needed to establish its own

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<sup>47</sup> Aleksandr Shaverdyan, 'Adzhal orduna', *Pravda*, 29 May 1939, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Yuriy Shaporin, 'Aychurek', *Pravda*, 27 May 1939, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Semyon Korev, 'Adzhal orduna', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 25 May 1939, 3.

<sup>50</sup> 'Bol'shaya shkola', *Izvestiya*, 6 June 1939, 3.

conservatoire. Such weaknesses apparently did not even escape the notice of Stalin himself. Vlasov recalled being summoned to the head table at the dekada's final reception, at which Stalin noted, 'The Moscow visitors have done a good job, but this is only the first step. It is necessary to carry on'.<sup>51</sup>

Two days after the letter was published, the KDI hosted the plenary discussion with the Kyrgyz visitors, chaired by the Committee's new head Khrapchenko. Grinberg and the musicologist Viktor Gorodinsky fixated again on the matter of poor vocal technique, both arguing that vocal weaknesses were 'not biological', but down to inadequate training.<sup>52</sup> Expanding on this point, Gorodinsky opined that Kyrgyzstan ought to heighten its receptivity towards European music more generally:

If the [Kyrgyz] comrades build their culture only by relying on the conquests and achievements of Kyrgyz music, poetry, and other folklore, they will not get far. In this regard, it is necessary [for them] to thrust themselves boldly into a framework that widely embraces new elements, and it is necessary to understand that 'national' does not at all mean 'mere folklore'.<sup>53</sup>

He went on to uphold Glinka as a model, the incontrovertible founder of Russian 'national' music, who had internalized German, French, and Italian elements. Vlasov, undoubtedly deflated by the tide of the discussion, emphasized that they were striving to create works within the accepted parameters of Soviet opera, citing Ivan Dzerzhinsky as a model to which they aspired.<sup>54</sup> There were even more dissenting views present, some even questioning the capacity of the dekadas to stimulate meaningful cultural transformation at all. The musicologist David Rabinovich complained 'we know that in Alma-Ata after the [Kazakh] dekada [in 1936] conditions have not improved' and that 'the

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<sup>51</sup> Vlasov, 'Rozhdeniye muzikal'nogo teatra', 81.

<sup>52</sup> 'Stenogramma soveshchaniya po obsuzhdeniyu itogov dekadi' kirgizskogo iskusstva', RGALI 962/21/42, 17.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> 'When speaking about Soviet opera, one speaks of Dzerzhinsky and other contemporary Soviet composers. We do not pretend that our operas match Dzerzhinsky's, but clearly one should analyse our operas and Soviet operas together'. In 1936, when Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was denounced, Dzerzhinsky's opera *The Quiet Don* had been officially upheld as a model Soviet opera. Perhaps hoping to change the subject, Vlasov turned to critiquing the dekada's sloppy press coverage, such as one report of a performance of 'Altin-orduna'. *Ibid.*, 46.

Uzbek Philharmonic, which at the time of their [1937] dekada showed great promise, has since deteriorated'.<sup>55</sup>

The narrow scope of the awards granted to the Kyrgyz *dekadniki* also suggests that they failed to meet expectations. In an early draft there were seven intended recipients for the most prestigious Order of Lenin, twenty-two for the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, and twenty-one for the Badge of Honour. Yet in the early archived draft the numbers are amended in pencil, reducing the numbers to three, fourteen, and twenty-nine respectively, drastically reducing the allocation of the more prestigious awards and redistributing them amongst lower categories.<sup>56</sup> The three remaining recipients for the Order of Lenin (awarded for services to national art) were Maldibayev, the poetry-reciter Sayakbay Karalayev, and the actress Anvar Kuttubayeva, though later Karalayev was also relegated to the lowlier Order of the Red Banner.<sup>57</sup> Vlasov and Feré each received the Order of the Red Banner, missing out on the top award given to their melodist collaborator.<sup>58</sup> All 576 participants were awarded the now-customary cash prize of two months' salary (ranging from five hundred to 6,000 roubles per participant), further inflating the dekada's 8.9-million-rouble price tag.<sup>59</sup> Thus, substantial investment was tempered by deliberate attempts to curb enthusiasm for Kyrgyz art presented at the dekada. However, the objective for 'Eastern' republics to gain parity with their 'Western' counterparts would continue to be lavishly supported for years to come.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. In 1948, Rabinovich's unpartisan views (though in reality probably his Jewishness) saw him arrested on the trumped-up charge of 'espionage' with American contacts and he was imprisoned in the GULAG, placed in the same camp as Prokofiev's first wife Lina. See Gennadiy Kostirchenko, *Taynaya politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodiye otnosheniya, 2003), 551; Simon Morrison, *The Love and Wars of Lina Prokofiev* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013), 265.

<sup>56</sup> RGALI 962/21/41, 16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, 74.

<sup>58</sup> *Moskovskiy Bol'shevik*, 8 June 1939, 1.

<sup>59</sup> RGALI 962/21/1, 1.

## Aram Khachaturian and the Armenian Dekada

**Box 4.2.** Principal productions of the Armenian dekada, 20–29 October 1939.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
20, 21*	Aleksandr Spendiaryan, <i>Almast</i> (1930)	Opera
22, 23*	Armen Tigranyan, <i>Anush</i> (1912, rev. 1935)	Opera
24*, 27, 28	Aram Khachaturian, <i>Schastye</i> [Happiness] (1939, rev. as <i>Gayane</i> 1942, 1957)	Ballet
25, 26*	Haro Stepanyan, <i>Lusabatsin</i> [At Dawn] (1938)	Opera
29*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

The KDI turned promptly to its next dekada venture: the Armenian festival scheduled for October 1939, which had been in preparation for about a year. One member of the Armenian opera theatre, Tatevik Sazandaryan, recalled the optimistic tone of the rehearsals, despite bureaucratic intrusions similar to those that had encumbered the Kyrgyz festival:

We were preparing for the 1939 dekada from the end of 1937. [...] [E]very day before rehearsals the first secretary of the Central Committee of the republic appeared. This was a formality, and after rehearsals, meetings were held. We staged the operas *Lusabatsin* [At Dawn] by [Haro] Stepanyan and *Almast* by [Aleksandr] Spendiaryan. Everyone was enthusiastic: a young republic, young theatre, and young artists.<sup>60</sup>

While Sazandaryan's memoir gives a valuable glimpse into the rehearsal process, preparations more likely began in earnest towards the end of 1938, after permission was secured from Moscow. In September of that year, the head of the Armenian Office on Arts Affairs formally wrote to Aleksey Nazarov (then still head of the Moscow branch) to request official permission to hold a dekada.<sup>61</sup> Nazarov set aside nearly a million roubles from the KDI's budget to cover initial preparations.<sup>62</sup> Approval was initially sought from Molotov, but the initial plans were eventually signed off by the veteran Armenian Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan.<sup>63</sup> Mikoyan expressed great interest in the festival's plans and kept in regular contact with the Committee about progress with dekada preparations. In September 1938, Khrapchenko wrote to Mikoyan to confirm the repertoire. The two

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Nami Mikoyan, *Svoimi glazami: S lyubov'yu i pechal'yu* (Moscow: SNC, 2018), 63.

<sup>61</sup> Letter of 5 September 1938. RGALI 962/21/20, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Mikhail Khrapchenko to Mikoyan, dated 16 September 1938. Ibid., 20. The original budget submitted by the Armenians in late 1938 projected that the whole festival would cost less than 3 million roubles (ibid., 74), but the overall costs eventually ran – by one final estimate – to 5.6 million (RGALI 962/21/24, 9).

<sup>63</sup> RGALI 962/21/20, 23.

operas mentioned in Sazandaryan's memoir (Spendiaryan's *Almast* and Stepanyan's *Lusabatsin*) had already been agreed. Khrapchenko added another opera to the list, Armen Tigranyan's *Anush*, as well as a mysteriously untitled and seemingly composerless ballet.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps because of this letter, Mikoyan intervened in the selection of the ballet. According to an archived plan, the favoured candidate had been a ballet titled *Nariné* by Sergey Barkhudaryan (1887–1972), who had studied composition at the Tbilisi Conservatoire with Zakharia Paliashvili and currently taught composition at the conservatories in Tbilisi and Yerevan.<sup>65</sup> Although Barkhudaryan completed *Nariné* in 1938, it would never be fully staged,<sup>66</sup> and the ballet was abruptly reassigned to the up-and-coming Moscow Conservatoire graduate Aram Khachaturian. Though of Armenian heritage, Khachaturian had never spent more than a short period in Armenia, having been born in Georgia and moved to Moscow in his late teens. According to an article published by Khachaturian during the Armenian dekada, Mikoyan personally approached him about the commission and even placed the composer in contact with the eminent stage director Gevork Ovanesyan, who would go on to prepare the libretto.<sup>67</sup> While Khachaturian's namedropping of Mikoyan lent prestige to the commission, it seems that the idea of writing an Armenian ballet had been on the composer's mind for several years. As early as November 1936 he confided in a letter to fellow composer Sergey Balasanyan that he planned to compose 'a ballet for the Armenians on a subject by Hovhannes Tumanyan'. However, in the same letter Khachaturian announced his plans to compose a symphonic work on Azerbaijani themes as well as a cantata hailing Stalin on a text by a group of Turkmen collective farmers, demonstrating that his ambition to explore national idioms extended well beyond Armenia.<sup>68</sup> Khachaturian soon publicly endorsed the dekada

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> The work was finally performed in Yerevan in 1940, but only in the form of two shortened symphonic suites. See Georgiy Tigranyan, 'Opernoye i baltenoye tvorchestvo armyanskikh kompozitorov', in Nelli Shakhnazarova (ed.), *Muzika sovetской Armenii: Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960), 50–51.

<sup>67</sup> Khachaturian, 'Balet *Schast'ye*', *Izvestiya*, 20 October 1939, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Letter of 24 November 1936, reproduced in Karina Balasanyan (ed.), *S. A. Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma: K 100-letuyi so dnya rozhdeniya kompozitora* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2003), 261.

project, hailing it 'a fine and powerful means for the continuous creative exchange of experiences, and for the mutual enrichment of national cultures', and trumpeted that Soviet music should aspire to a 'synthesis of all the cultures of the multinational Soviet Union'.<sup>69</sup>

Khachaturian arrived in Yerevan early in 1939, describing the trip variously to biographers as a 'second conservatoire' or a 'period of exile'.<sup>70</sup> He achieved an impressive rate of progress in collecting materials and completing the ballet in the tight timescale available: the first of three acts was completed in twenty days, the whole ballet within six months.<sup>71</sup> It seems that even in his 'exile', Khachaturian was already attracting commissions for other national works, not necessarily limited to Armenia. Shortly into his time in Yerevan, Khachaturian announced in the Armenian press that he had already secured agreements with the Bolshoi to write another ballet on his return to Moscow, to be titled *The Bird of the East*, about a young Uzbek woman who trains as a pilot after freeing herself from the yoke of oppression.<sup>72</sup> The plot of the proposed ballet bears obvious resemblance to Glière's *Gyulsara*, although *The Bird of the East* ultimately never came to fruition. Nonetheless, the nature of such a commission suggests that Khachaturian had not yet been pigeonholed as an Armenian composer: a reputation that he would come to both relish and resent, as I shall discuss below.

*Schast'ye* (Happiness, or 'Good Fortune'), the title of the ballet that Khachaturian eventually produced for the Armenian dekada, centres around a love story between a young village girl (Kariné) and a border guard (Armen) on a collective farm. Like other Russian composers who had written dekada works, Khachaturian attempted to forge a creative synthesis between local and European culture. His strategy, however, was no more original than any before him, declaring his intention to 'symphonize' dance music, by

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<sup>69</sup> Khachaturyan, 'Misl'i i vpechatleniye' *Sovetskaya muzika* 1938/4, 34–35.

<sup>70</sup> Grigory Shneerson, *Aram Khachaturyan*, Xenia Danko (trans.) (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959 [1958]), 46; Viktor Yuzefovich, *Aram Khachaturyan*, Nicholas Kournkoff and Vladimir Bobrov (trans.) (New York: Sphinx: 1985), 129.

<sup>71</sup> The ballet was begun in late February and premiered in Yerevan that September. Khubov, *Aram Khachaturyan: Monografiya*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Muzika, 1967 [1962]), 188. See also Khachaturyan, 'Balet *Schast'ye*', 3.

<sup>72</sup> Khachaturyan, 'Vesna muzikal'noy kul'turi', *Kommunist* (Yerevan), 1 May 1939, 3.



'subordinating [musical material] to the principle of contrasting, dialectical development'.<sup>73</sup>

So far as dekada composers sat on the spectrum of national authenticity and European progress, it seemed that Khachaturian was placing his faith further towards the latter. This tension had proven hard to reconcile for visiting Russian composers, at least to the satisfaction of critics. Glière and Brusilovsky had been generally deemed excessively European, Vlasov and Feré not enough so. Khachaturian might at least have hoped that his Armenian heritage might accord him some protection. But unlike the visiting Russian composers of previous dekadas, Khachaturian's new ballet was being staged alongside three operas by native composers, which proved to be stiff competition.

Of the three operas performed at the dekada, only Stepanyan's *Lusabatsin* could claim to be recent.<sup>74</sup> Aleksandr Spendiaryan (often Russianized to Spendiarov) was a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov and had worked feverishly on his opera *Almast* up until his death in 1928. The orchestration had been completed by Maximilian Steinberg. Though many commentators mistakenly declared the dekada performance to be the premiere, *Almast* had received its premiere in Moscow in June 1930, three years before its first staging in Armenia.<sup>75</sup> Based on the epic poem 'The Capture of Tmkabert', the opera is set in eighteenth-century Crimea. Tatul is the ruler of the Armenian fortress Tmkabert, which is under threat from the armies of Nadir, the Shah of Persia. Almast (soprano) is betrothed to Tatul, but a charming Persian musician arrives (a spy sent by Nadir) who convinces her to leave Tatul for Nadir. Almast betrays Tatul and helps Nadir's forces take the Armenian fortress, but she in turn is eventually betrayed and executed by Nadir. For the dekada production, Steinberg was commissioned to write a new scene which altered the ending.

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<sup>73</sup> Khachaturyan, 'Kak ya rabotal nad baletom *Schast'ye*', in Ye. Loginov (ed.), *Gosudarstvenniy teatr operi i baleta Armenii imeni A. A. Spendiarova* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1939), 200. The term 'symphonism' was coined by Boris Asafiev and widely used by critics, becoming something of a cliché in Soviet musicological discourse. See Daniel Elphick, 'Boris Asafiev and Soviet Musical Thought: Reputation and Influence', *Muzikologija* 30 (2021), 57–74.

<sup>74</sup> In a meeting after the dekada, Khrapchenko used this fact to lament the lack of new Armenian operas, noting that although there were forty-two notable Armenian composers currently working, they only had two or three operas to their name between them, and only one had been mounted at the dekada. 'So where are the new [Armenian] operas?' he asked. RGALI 962/21/21, 19.

<sup>75</sup> See announcements in *Pravda*: 23 June 1930, 8; 8 September 1930, 4; and 17 September 1930, 4. *Almast* was premiered in Armenia on 20 January 1933. See Tigranyan, 'Opernoye i baletnoye tvorchestvo armyanskikh kompozitorov', 34.

With a zealously nationalistic and revolutionary twist, the Armenian people overrun the fortress and collectively exile Almast for her treachery.<sup>76</sup>

Musically, *Almast* bears similarities with Rimsky-Korsakov's 'orientalist' musical imagery, though generally it is more naturally improvisatory and expansive in phrase structure. Indeed, in a conversation with Spendaryan related by Vasily YastrebsteV, Rimsky-Korsakov declared that his Armenian pupil's construction of the orient was more 'authentic' than his own, which was self-confessedly 'somewhat far-fetched and speculative' since the orient was not 'in his blood'.<sup>77</sup> In its harmonic language, *Almast* is also more progressive, pushing the Wagnerian tone of late Rimsky-Korsakov into Straussian territory. *Almast* was a cut above the usual dekada fare, and its reviews were universally glowing. Even Shostakovich, in a rare public dekada pronouncement, noted that 'leaving the theatre, you experience a feeling of great joy in the art of the great Armenian people, who create such wonderful works as this production of *Almast*'.<sup>78</sup> The opera was deemed 'an unassailable victory for the Spendiarov State Theatre',<sup>79</sup> and assessed as 'deservedly one of the greatest operas in the Armenian musical canon'.<sup>80</sup> Another review praised Spendaryan's success in transcending 'the traditional orientalism [*orientalizm*] of his predecessors', a feat that was 'repeatedly recognized by his great Russian composer contemporaries'.<sup>81</sup> *Almast* even impressed the sceptical David Rabinovich, who gushed that the work was 'a first-class opera worthy to grace the stage of any opera house' and that 'the great skill with which the opera is written is based on the

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<sup>76</sup> The original ending was restored in the 1971 score and the excellent 1985 film adaptation. See Spendaryan, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy* (EreVan: Ayastan, 1971), X: 15–16; T. Levonyan (dir.), *Almast* (Armenfil'm, 1985).

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Adalyat Issiyeva, 'Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov and His Orient', in Marina Frolova-Walker (ed.), *Rimsky-Korsakov and his World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 145, citing YastrebsteV, *N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov: Vospominaniya YastrebsteVa*, 2 vols (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1960), II: 468.

<sup>78</sup> Shostakovich, 'Svezhest, isrennost', yarkost'', *Kommunist* (YereVan), 22 October 1939, 1. Shostakovich also gave a note of admiration to the reworkings of his former composition teacher ('The excellent work of the composer Steinberg on the finales of the second and fourth acts should be noted').

<sup>79</sup> Aleksandr Shaverdyan, '*Almast*', *Pravda*, 21 October 1939, 66.

<sup>80</sup> M. Gavrilov, '*Almast*: Na spektakle dekadi' armyanskogo iskustva', *Moskovskiy Bol'shevik*, 22 October 1939, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Semyon Korev, '*Almast*', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 21 October 1939, 33. Korev goes on to quote some admiring remarks from Glazunov, lifted from reminiscences just published in *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/9–10, 11–17.

composer's organic and clever assimilation of the best traditions of world opera'. He praised the sophisticated reworking of Wagnerian leitmotifs, deeming it worthy of the legacy of Glinka, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov. For Rabinovich, *Almast* was not so much the continuation as the culmination of Russian musical orientalism, akin to what Vladimir Stasov had recognized as 'national coloration' in Glinka's music. For Stasov, this meant that 'nationality' in music should be founded not just on melody, but on 'general character' and 'the coalescence of diverse and vast conditions'.<sup>82</sup>

Another voice to join the barrage of positive assessment of *Almast* was the Armenian writer Marietta Shaginyan, who considered it the best of the four dekada works.<sup>83</sup> Shaginyan took issue with the relentless political hype surrounding the dekada, which she felt came at the expense of serious artistic and 'historical' criticism. She noted that the four operas outlined the arc of Armenian history from pre-Soviet times to the present, and that the works would be better reordered chronologically (*Anush – Almast – Lusabatsin – Schast'ye*), distilling recent Armenian history into a Wagner-style tetralogy. For Shaginyan, this also had the happy consequence of moving *Lusabatsin* ('a thing complex and instructive in its mistakes') to a middle position, rather than round things off in an anti-climax.<sup>84</sup>

Yet defying Shaginyan's reordering, Tigranyan's love-tragedy *Anush* became the second work to be performed. Tigranyan, a graduate from the Tbilisi Music School, produced the first version of *Anush* in 1912. After some initial reluctance from Tsarist censors, it was performed shortly thereafter without amendment to the text.<sup>85</sup> The work had also been the second production of the Yerevan Opera House after its inaugural production of *Almast*. Since it had been originally conceived with amateurs in mind,

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<sup>82</sup> Rabinovich, 'Opera A. Spendiarova *Almast*', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 24 October 1939, 3. For the original quote, see Stasov, 'Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka', *Izbranniye sochineniya* (Moscow: Yurayt, 2017), II: 52. Rabinovich misquotes the word I translate as 'diverse' as *obshchirnikh* (broad) rather than Stasov's *raznorodnikh*.

<sup>83</sup> Before the Revolution, Shaginyan had known Rakhmaninov and Medtner, and was a long-time champion of Shostakovich. She had dramatically exited the Writers' Union in protest in February 1936 during the anti-formalist debates. See 'Po povodu zayavleniya M. Shaginyan o vikhode iz soyuza pisateley', *Pravda*, 29 February 1936, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Shaginyan, 'Dekada armyanskogo iskusstva', *Noviy mir* 1939/9–10, 374.

<sup>85</sup> Armen Tigranyan, 'Neskol'ko slov ob opere Anush', in Loginov (ed.), *Gosudarstvenniy teatr operi i baleta*, 63.

Tigranyan set about revising *Anush* for the Yerevan premiere. The new version, with much expanded vocal parts and orchestration, was premiered in March 1935.<sup>86</sup> While enthusiasm for *Anush* at the dekada was generally high, it played second fiddle to *Almast*. Yury Shaporin was most blunt in laying out the work's faults. Though he praised the authentic folk basis of the opera, for Shaporin the new version failed to hide the fact that it was a reworking of an opera initially conceived for amateurs. This was evident from the excessive doubling of vocal parts in the orchestra, which undermined the expressiveness of the performance.<sup>87</sup> He also complained that Tigranyan tended to overindulge in slow tempi and was inclined to stay in the same key for too long, citing the entire first act as an example.<sup>88</sup>

The final opera shown at the dekada, Stepanyan's *Lusabatsin* (At Dawn), differed from the other two in that it was based on more recent revolutionary events in Armenia. The background to the plot was the 1920 May Uprising, a failed *coup d'état* by the Armenian Bolsheviks against the ruling Dashnak (nationalist) party.<sup>89</sup> In a dekada promotional pamphlet that accompanied the festival, the opera was credited with the ambitious task of 'overcoming primitive and imitative "orientalism"' as well as with raising the profile of Armenian opera to the same calibre as contemporary Soviet opera.<sup>90</sup> Another commentator heralded the opera as a valid prototype for Soviet heroic opera, praising the composer for his mastery of operatic form, and sensitive musical response to a variety of dramatic situations.<sup>91</sup> But while most reviewers rated the music a triumph,

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Atayan and Matevos Muradyan, *Armen Tigranyan* (Moscow: Muzika, 1966), 30.

<sup>87</sup> Shaporin, 'Anush', *Pravda*, 23 October 1939, 6. Affirming Shaporin's point, another review complained that the orchestra solely played an accompanying role, and that there was a lack of orchestral interludes – see K. Isakov, 'Anush', *Moskovskiy Bol'shevik*, 23 October 1939, 2.

<sup>88</sup> Shaporin, 'Anush', 6. Another review reinforced this claim, suggesting that 'moments of emotional freshness and melodic richness' were occasionally 'overly laconic'. See Ye. Groshev, 'Opera A. Tigranyana *Anush*', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 24 October 1939, 33. Whilst the first scene of *Anush* is indeed notated entirely with a B-flat/G minor key signature, the music modulates relatively frequently, and thereafter changes of key are abundant.

<sup>89</sup> The opera centres on the brothers Grigor and Aram, the former a committed Bolshevik rebel, the latter a dim-witted henchman for the Dashnak oppressors. Aram betrays his brother, giving him up to the Dashnaks for a generous reward. The Dashnaks soon begin persecuting Aram's family and brutally murder his father. Enlightened by these cruelties, Aram joins the revolutionaries. He rescues Grigor and the other rebels from prison, who collectively defeat the Dashnaks.

<sup>90</sup> L. Kalantar, 'O postanovke operi *Lusabatsin*', in Loginov (ed.), *Gosudarstvenniy teatr operi i baleta*, 122.

<sup>91</sup> M. Grinberg, 'Lusabatsin', *Kommunist* (Yerevan), 28 October 1939, 4.

many agreed that Stepanyan had been set up to fail by an overly complex and dramatically imbalanced libretto.<sup>92</sup>

In preparing his ballet, then, Khachaturian faced several obstacles. First, while Vlasov and Feré had had three years to prepare their productions, Khachaturian had just over six months to conceive a fully staged ballet from scratch. Secondly, unlike Vlasov and Feré who had arrived in Kyrgyzstan more-or-less to a cultural blank canvas, Khachaturian was entering an established European-style tradition, and was inevitably perceived as an outsider by some. One Armenian contributor expressed this quite bluntly at the dekada plenary:

When we received comrades Simonov,<sup>93</sup> Melik-Pashayev,<sup>94</sup> and Khachaturian, we hardly expected them to make fireworks at our dekada. We thought they were in Armenia but ashamed to admit they were Armenian. This same Khachaturian, who wrote a Symphony for the fifteenth anniversary of the Sovietization of Armenia, was simply not recognized as being Armenian. His Symphony and *Ode to Stalin* are played everywhere except in Armenia.<sup>95</sup>

Notably, Armenia's principal Russian-language newspaper hardly devoted any coverage to Khachaturian or his ballet during the dekada, despite running a plethora of articles, comments, and photos covering the other dekada works.<sup>96</sup> As with Stepanyan for *Lusabatsin*, most reviewers painted Khachaturian as a talented composer hampered by a shoddy libretto. Even the preface for a commemorative abridged score apologized for 'somewhat unsophisticated' aspects of the libretto.<sup>97</sup> In an in-depth study of the composer for *Sovetskaya muzika*, the Armenian-born musicologist Georgy Khubov (later Khachaturian's biographer) suggested that the tight deadline for the work was responsible for some of the weaker musical themes, which occasionally bordered on crudeness. He

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<sup>92</sup> See, for instance Mikhail Cheryomukhin, '*Lusabatsin*', *Izvestiya*, 25 October 1939, 3. Claims for the dramatic weaknesses of the opera were widespread. In a later Soviet source, the Armenian musicologist Georgiy Geodakyan argued that the libretto was overcomplicated, while many characters were too similar and 'poorly individualized'. See Keldish, *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 394.

<sup>93</sup> Ruben Simonov (1899–1963) prominent Moscow-based director who was dispatched to Armenia to act as the dekada's artistic director.

<sup>94</sup> Aleksandr Melik-Pashayev (1905–1964), Soviet-Armenian conductor.

<sup>95</sup> RGALI 962/21/19, 75.

<sup>96</sup> See *Kommunist* (Yerevan), 20–28 October 1939. The only mentions of *Schast'ye* were a reproduction of the official report of Stalin's 24 October attendance (26 October, 1) and a rerun of Khubov's positive *Pravda* review (27 October, 2). See also Khubov, '*Schast'ye*: Balet A. Khachaturyana', *Pravda*, 25 October 1939, 6

<sup>97</sup> Aleksandr Shaverdyan, 'Aram Khachaturyan i yego balet', in Khachaturyan, *Schast'ye* (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1939), 6.

cited the ‘Dance of the Conscripts’ (Example 4.2), whose static harmonies and fanfare-cum-ragtime feel transgressed beyond socialist-realist accessibility to the point of sheer crudity. This is one of several numbers that Khachaturian cut while revising the work into an entirely new ballet, *Gayané*, which was premiered in Leningrad in December 1942.<sup>98</sup>

**Example 4.2.** Khachaturian, *Schast’ye*, act 1, ‘Dance of the Conscripts’.

The musical score for 'Dance of the Conscripts' is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a tempo marking of 'Allegro ma non troppo' and a quarter note equal to 112. The music is in 2/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (D major). The first system starts with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The right hand features a trill (*tr*) in the final measure of the system. The second system begins at measure 7 and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It also features a trill (*tr*) in the right hand. The score is written for piano, with both treble and bass staves shown.

When revising *Schast’ye* into *Gayané*, Khachaturian was keen to disavow the work’s dekada heritage, emphasizing the complete departure from its predecessor. Ahead of the premiere of the first revision in 1942, Khachaturian wrote: ‘I am terribly offended that people look on my ballet as an outdated piece, as something perverse [*porochnoye*], as some ‘dekada’ piece [*nechto dekadnoye*]; this word alone implies everything’.<sup>99</sup> Dmitry Kabalevsky recalled in 1975 that for those who enjoyed *Gayané* ‘few remember the beginning of Khachaturian’s musical-theatrical activity, his *Schast’ye*’. Recalling the Moscow premiere, he continued that the early ballet ‘shared the fate of many “dekada” performances of that time. As a spectacle it was festive, presentable, and colourful, but not especially profound. The showiness of the affair clearly prevailed over its content’.<sup>100</sup> Such anti-dekada sentiments amongst Russian composers were widespread, in part

<sup>98</sup> After the 1942 premiere of *Gayané*, it too was dramatically revised with a new libretto for a production at the Kirov in 1952, and with a third libretto yet again for a 1957 Bolshoi production.

<sup>99</sup> Undated letter to Zinaida Gayamova (around Autumn 1942). Khachaturyan, *Pis’ma*, 34.

<sup>100</sup> Kabalevskiy, ‘Trizhdi bogatiy’, in Sof’ya Ribakova (ed.), *Aram Il’ich Khachaturyan: Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1975), 23.

perhaps driven by sour grapes over the enormous state attention lavished on works they perceived as sub-par. While other arts journals continued to run headline articles, by 1940 the official mouthpiece of the Composers' Union *Sovetskaya muzika* had drastically reduced its reporting on the dekadas and music in the republics. This editorial oversight went unnoticed only for so long. An Agitprop document from December 1949 attacked 'serious mistakes' made by the journal. Amongst the journal's many failings was that it had failed to produce 'a single article on the music of Ukraine, Belorussia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and a number of other republics'. What little coverage of music in the republics that had been included had been lazily lifted from newspaper reviews or brief travel impressions, which failed 'to reflect the creative life of these republics'.<sup>101</sup>

Notwithstanding the attempts to distance himself from his connection with the Armenian festival, Khachaturian's early status as a dekada composer may well have cemented his reputation forever as the foremost modern Armenian national composer. By 1960, a reference work about Armenian music grandly touted that 'under the conditions of Soviet reality, the work of a large galaxy of Armenian composers has been led by the outstanding composer Aram Khachaturian'.<sup>102</sup> His firmly cemented national credentials also afforded him a veneer of respectability in times of crisis. During the 1948 *Zhdanovshchina* – in which Khachaturian, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and other composers were attacked for their 'formalist' tendencies – the composer's 'Eastern' credentials gave him some protection. In a hostile critique of Khachaturian in the aftermath of the affair, Tamara Livanova insisted that the only examples of Khachaturian's compositions that escaped formalism were those in which he 'speaks at the top of his voice in his national musical language'.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, in an emotional speech given in the aftermath of the 1948

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<sup>101</sup> Dzhakhangir Nadzhafov (ed.), *Stalin i kosmopolitizm: Dokumenti agitpropa TsK KPSS, 1945–1953* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniy fond "Demokratiya", 2005), 539 (reproducing RGASPI 177/132/244). The criticism was made public in an article by Zaven Vartanyan and Boris Yarustovskiy in *Kul'tura i zhizn'*, 21 October 1949, 4, translated as 'For a Militant Music Magazine', in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 42/1 (1949), 8–9.

<sup>102</sup> Shakhnazarova (ed.), *Muzika sovetskoy Armenii*, 5. The later Soviet textbook *History of the Music of the Peoples of the USSR* opens its chapter on Armenian music in the 1930s with an eleven-page discussion of Khachaturian's early works. See Keldish, *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR*, II: 381ff.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Richard Taruskin, *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 277 (citing Livanova, 'Aram Khachaturyan i yego kritiki', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1948/5, 43).

affair, Khachaturian admitted to having at times spurned his national roots and given in to pressures to 'go beyond the national'.<sup>104</sup> Even in the infamous Order 17, which stipulated works prohibited from broadcast or public performance, only the Third Symphony was listed, a work that pushes the boundaries of orchestral sonorities and indeed strays furthest from Khachaturian's 'national' language.<sup>105</sup>

Political expediency aside, the composer was genuinely proud of his Armenian heritage from his student days to the end of his life. He had grown up with the Russianized surname of Khachaturov, but had adopted the Armenian form only after his move to Moscow in 1922.<sup>106</sup> He travelled to Armenia almost every year throughout his career, gradually collecting a plethora of national honours, and soon had a street in Yerevan named after him. In later life, when a newspaper dared to print an article questioning his national Armenian status, Khachaturian was incandescent with rage, accusing the authors of being national traitors and insisting on a public retraction.<sup>107</sup> On other occasions, however, he seemed to downplay the importance of national characteristics. At a 1944 plenary meeting of the Composers' Union he complained that 'they are trying to keep me within the boundaries of national music'.<sup>108</sup> Then again in 1960, when the Stalinist maxim 'national in form, socialist in content' was tentatively critiqued for having been too far skewed towards the former, Khachaturian vocally supported lessening the status of national music.<sup>109</sup>

If such comments seem contradictory, they are best understood as attempts to foster a more nuanced perception of national identity in his work, challenging those who

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<sup>104</sup> 'I was called an Armenian composer, they said that I was the composer of Armenia, it offended me. I am responsible for my mistakes. I was inspired by the most serious people that it is necessary to go beyond the national'. Quoted in Yekaterina Vlasova, *1948 god v sovetskoy muzike* (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2010), 287 (citing TsAOPIM 1292/1/11, 117–42).

<sup>105</sup> Reproduced in Irina Bobikina (ed.), *Dmitriy Shostakovich v pis'makh i dokumentakh* (Moscow: GTsMMK, 2000), 533.

<sup>106</sup> Viktor Yuzefovich, "'Sovetskoye isskustvo velikoye i bol'shoye": Po stranitsam pisem kompozitora', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1980/7, 12.

<sup>107</sup> For a full translation of Khachaturian's 1973 letter to the Lebanese newspaper *Aztag*, see Appendix 2.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 378 (citing RGALI 2077/1/92).

<sup>109</sup> 'Hitherto all attention has been concentrated on national form in music – stylistic, rhythmic, and so on. Content has been subservient to form. But this is wrong, because socialist content is what makes the music of any republic its own Soviet music'. Quoted in Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia 1917–1981*, enl. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1983), 333, translation adjusted.



berated either his *dekadnĭy* 'national' banality or his proclivity for European orthodoxy. A comment from Uzeir Hajibeyov at a 1940 Stalin Prize committee meeting demonstrates the extent to which some struggled to accept Khachaturian's dual-national status:

What kind of music is he writing? If he is a national composer we have to make one set of demands on him, but if he is a Moscow composer, then the demands are different. In order to write Armenian music, a good knowledge of Armenian folk music is needed. But this is what interests him least of all. And if he has some folk aspects, they're merely a smokescreen. The music he writes has nothing to do with [true] folk music.<sup>110</sup>

It was this binary perception of nationality in his work that most irked the composer. In this sense, he was a true subscriber to the idea of creative synthesis *à la* Glière. In 1928, before he had even entered the conservatoire, he had eloquently spelled out this credo in an autobiographical sketch, that he aimed:

To portray Armenian music with its melodic and rhythmic riches in the refraction of European compositional technique. To pass all this through the prism of European musical art. To get away from that tedious dominant-tonic [motion], from these static harmonies on which our old composers relied. To make our [Armenian] music the property of all peoples.<sup>111</sup>

This ambition would be restated throughout his life,<sup>112</sup> and he was exasperated by suggestions that Soviet art was duty bound to segregate cultural identities. In a letter of June 1945, Khachaturian spelled out these frustrations to the Armenian musicologist and writer Aleksandr Gayamov:

You can understand me like no one else. Just like me, you were entirely brought up and raised on Russian culture. You love, appreciate and know this culture, you have a sense for everything Russian that is wonderful. [...] You love all this, you understand, you feel, but all this does not prevent you from being a true Armenian patriot. You do not love Armenia for its good peaches and delicious water. You love it for its great past and present. All that I have rightly attributed to you is also characteristic of me.<sup>113</sup>

And so, for Khachaturian at least, his dual identity was no paradox at all. But emphasis on the composer's Armenian identity dominated perceptions of the composer's music in his own lifetime and beyond. Since his music began to gain traction in the West

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, 149 (citing RGALI 2073/1/1, 192).

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Yuzefovich, 'Sovetskoye isskustvo velikoye i bol'shoye', 12.

<sup>112</sup> For instance, in a conversation with his Armenian biographer towards the end of his life, the composer claimed that Russian oriental music 'has shown me that a cultural convergence between East and West is not merely possible but necessary for mutual cultural enrichment', going on to cite Glinka's and Balakirev's orientalism as influences. Georgiy Tigranov, *Aram Il'ich Khachaturyan: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Muzĭka, 1978), 23. The quote is absent from the same author's revised 1987 biography.

<sup>113</sup> Reproduced in Yuzefovich, 'Sovetskoye isskustvo velikoye i bol'shoye', 11 (citing RGALI 2779/1/34, no page given).

in the 1940s, Western reference articles have generally referenced the ‘Armenian composer’, with little discussion of the nuances of national identity. This perception of Khachaturian’s work is hardly better in Russia. As Levon Hakobian has noted, even for Russian audiences the composer’s ‘artistic merits are shadowed by his widely publicized image as a colourful hedonist from the Caucasus’.<sup>114</sup> To do Khachaturian’s music full justice then, would be to consider how the Armenian-ness cross-pollinated and existed in tension with his Russian and European aspirations.

In conclusion, the imbalance in cultural attainment between republics could affect the reception of composers in surprising and disparate ways. For example, the extent to which Khachaturian struggled to make an impression in the arena of national music while Vlasov and Feré were championed at the Kyrgyz dekada speaks less to skill as to more favourable circumstances. While dekada bombast could serve to mask deep-seated cultural rifts, subsequent interventions to redress them proved ineffective. The Kyrgyz and Armenian dekadas were exposed cultural rifts between ‘Eastern’ republics and their ‘Western’ counterparts, and this was becoming increasingly plainer to see to those in Moscow. While new training institutions were founded and funds invested to address the *kulturnost* imbalance, it would be some years before a new generation of trained musicians and composers rose through the ranks, and the outbreak of war in 1941 proved both a disruptive and constructive factor in this process. Some Central Asian republics made use of the influx of musically inclined wartime refugees from Moscow. Kazakhstan, for instance, deployed the new talent to prepare a new version of Brusilovsky’s *Kiz-Zhibek*.<sup>115</sup> For others, the reception was frostier. For example, Feré had personally to pull a whole host of strings until authorities relented in finding Myaskovsky (his former teacher) accommodation in Frunze where he was evacuated in 1942 (only reluctantly provided when it was discovered that he was a Stalin-Prize winner).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Akopyan [Hakobian], ‘Rubens Vostoka: K 115-letnyuyu so dnya rozhdeniya Arama Khachaturyana’, *Muzikal’naya akademiya* 2018/3, 197.

<sup>115</sup> S. K. Musakhodzhayeva, ‘Kollektivnoye avtorskovo v kazakhstoy opere’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Kazakh National University of the Arts, 2020), 106.

<sup>116</sup> Patrick Zuk, *Nikolay Myaskovsky: A Composer and His Times* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021), 395–97.

But there was little success in resolving the *kulturnost* imbalance over the intervening years. By 1947 none of the five opera houses in Central Asia had an opera in their repertoire based on a contemporary Soviet topic.<sup>117</sup> While the Tashkent Conservatoire had existed for ten years, intake was very low, and one report complained of institutionalized 'dumbing down' (*skidka*) of the curriculum. It struggled to produce opera singers that were capable of doing justice to classical opera repertoire, and the composition department performed no better. Composers graduating with a full diploma fell short of the requirements even of the most basic course at the Leningrad Conservatoire and were incapable of performing their own compositions. This was if they graduated at all, since many dropped out early only to be given jobs in arts institutions in any case.<sup>118</sup> These problems would finally come to a head in the post-Stalin era. For now, it was a slow ticking time bomb.

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<sup>117</sup> Viktor Vinogradov, 'O melose i o kadrakh', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1947/1, 78.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

## Chapter 5 – In the Shadow of War: Belorussia, Buryat-Mongolia, and Tajikistan

### Towards the Belorussian Dekada

**Box 5.1.** Principal productions of the Belorussian dekada, 5–15 June 1940.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
5, 3, 13	Yevgeny Tikotsky, <i>Mikhas Podgorny</i> (1939)	Opera
7*, 8	Aleksey Turenkov, <i>Tsvetok schastya</i> [The Flower of Happiness] (1940)	Opera
9, 10*	Mikhail Kroshner, <i>Solovey</i> [The Nightingale] (1939)	Ballet
11, 12	Anatol Bogatiryov, <i>V pushchakh Polesya</i> [In the Forests of Polesye] (1939)	Opera
15*	Concert	

\* Attended by Stalin.

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, triggering what would become the Second World War. Two weeks later, the Soviets mounted a simultaneous invasion from the east. The synchronized incursion was secretly planned in advance with the German-Soviet Treaty of Non-Aggression, in which the Soviets promised neutrality in any forthcoming war. In a secret protocol attached to the treaty the Soviets named the price for their non-involvement: a future claim to Bessarabia, Estonia, Latvia, and Eastern Poland.<sup>1</sup> In his capacity as the recently appointed People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Vyacheslav Molotov publicly justified the Polish invasion on the grounds that the German-Polish conflict had demonstrated the 'internal bankruptcy and clear incompetence of the Polish state', and that the country had become 'a convenient field for all sorts of accidents and surprises that could threaten the USSR'.<sup>2</sup> The Red Army encountered little resistance in its partition of Eastern Poland – the regions of Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia had only been ceded to Poland in 1921 as a result of the Soviet defeat in the Polish-Soviet War (1918–21). The loss of the territory, which contained few Poles, had long been

<sup>1</sup> Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda*, 18 September 1939, 1.

a bone of contention. Stalin was also driven by paranoia that these regions were overrun with anti-Soviet Ukrainian and Belorussian nationalists.<sup>3</sup>

It seemed that the Soviet Union only stood to profit from war in Europe, territorially, economically, and culturally, and the overall aim of this chapter is to unpick how the war came to affect cultural domestic policy, while demonstrating how these later decades perpetuated and developed aspects explored in the earlier festivals. Shortly after its annexation, a group of musicians arrived in Western Belorussia to assess the musical situation. The composer Nikolay Shcheglov chronicled the trip, condemning the Polish musical establishment to its core.<sup>4</sup> He lamented the 'eerie contrasts' between the Soviet Union and the 'Western culture' of the former Polish territory, especially the lack of structured concert life outside Warsaw and pitiful musicians' salaries.<sup>5</sup> Shcheglov accused Polish authorities of vilifying Russian musicians repeatedly, and for actively supporting musical institutions that excluded Jews. The Polish educational system had apparently rushed musicians through the conservatoire, letting them graduate before they had reached a sufficient professional standard. Young performers, Shcheglov claimed, were driven by a lack of opportunities 'towards hack performances to earn a few zloty'. The Belorussian composers interviewed many musicians from the stream of desperate refugees crossing the Soviet border.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps anxious to ingratiate themselves with the Soviet authorities, some offered incriminating quotes to support Shcheglov's anti-Western narrative. One violinist seeking work in the symphony orchestra had seen his skills apparently eroded by years of 'restaurant jazz'. He complained: 'You can imagine the feeling of disgust with which I played café tunes. On coming home, I opened Beethoven's sonatas but despaired that I could not play them, and so I completely stopped opening them so as not to torment myself'.<sup>7</sup> But while the Soviet musical world enjoyed mocking

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939–1953* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 37–38.

<sup>4</sup> Shcheglov, 'Muzikal'noye iskusstvo Zapadnoy Belorussii', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/11, 69–74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> The composer Mieczysław Weinberg, who was among the refugees, recalled: 'I shall never forget how mothers with their children hugged the horses' legs, pleading to be allowed to cross to the Soviet side as quickly as possible'. Quoted in David Fanning, *Mieczysław Weinberg: In Search of Freedom* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2010), 23.

<sup>7</sup> Shcheglov, 'Muzikal'noye iskusstvo Zapadnoy Belorussii', 72.

the Polish musical establishment, amongst the refugees there were some serious talents, and many would buttress the conservatoire and orchestras of Minsk in the following years.

Six months before the invasion of Poland, Belorussia had premiered Tikotsky's *Mikhas Podgorny*, its first home-grown opera. Tikotsky had been largely self-taught, aside from some private composition lessons with the avant-gardist Vladimir Deshevov. His aspirations for a conservatoire education had been thwarted by his conscription into the First World War.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, in the subsequent twenty years he had cemented himself as a leading national composer, authoring the first Belorussian symphony and finding some success with the farcical antireligious operetta *The Kitchen of Holiness (Kukhnya svyatosti)*.<sup>9</sup> The March 1939 premiere of *Mikhas Podgorny* earned a cramped announcement in *Pravda*, which acknowledged a salutatory telegram from the opera's cast to Stalin, who was then presiding over the Eighteenth Party Congress.<sup>10</sup> Emboldened, Belorussian officials soon wrote to Aleksey Nazarov (then still head of the KDI) with a formal request for a dekada.<sup>11</sup> The Politburo soon passed a 'secret' resolution declaring that it would be 'expedient' to hold a Belorussian dekada in the spring of 1940, and released 4.5 million roubles to cover expenses (see Figure 5.1).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See obituary, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1971/3, 160.

<sup>9</sup> 'K predstoyashchey dekadě belorusskogo iskusstva', undated clipping from *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, RGALI 962/21/26, 169.

<sup>10</sup> 'Prem'yera operi *Mikhas' Podgorniy*', *Pravda*, 12 March 1939, 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Vladimir Nevezhin, 'Osobennosti organizatsii dekadi belorusskogo iskusstva v Moskve', in A. Kolganova (ed.), *Natsional'niy teatr v kontekste mnogonatsional'noy kul'turi* (Moscow: Tri kvadrata, 2010), 264.

<sup>12</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1231, 124.

Figure 5.1. Politburo order mandating a Belorussian dekada.

Экз. 10

СЕКРЕТНО.

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11.

В ПОЛИТБЮРО ЦК ВКП(б).

Совнарком Белорусской ССР и Комитет по делам искусств при СНК СССР просят разрешить провести весной 1940 г. в Москве <sup>в Москве</sup> ~~декаду~~ Белорусского искусства и выделить в 1939 г. из резервного фонда СНК СССР на расходы, связанные с подготовкой декады 4.493,0 тыс.рублей.

СНК СССР считает целесообразным проведение декады Белорусского искусства в апреле-мае 1940 года.

Прошу принять следующее решение:

1. Разрешить Комитету по делам искусств при СНК СССР провести в Москве в апреле-мае 1940 года декаду Белорусского искусства.

2. Выделить в распоряжение СНК БССР в 1939 г. из резервного фонда СНК СССР 4.493,0 тыс.руб. на расходы, связанные с подготовкой декады Белорусского искусства.

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Source: RGASPI 17/163/1231, 124.

It was no doubt 'expedient' since dekada organizers were alive to the political significance of Belorussia's proximity to war-torn Europe. The KDI's deputy chairman Aleksandr Solodovnikov led a trip to Minsk in May 1940, recalling in his memoirs:

We arrived in Minsk in those days when the period of the 'phoney war' had ended in the West and Nazi hordes were rushing at full speed to Paris and Dunkirk. It was enough to turn on the radio in the hotel to hear the unrelenting 'iron' rhythm of the Wehrmacht's warlike marches, occasionally interspersed with the yapping speeches of the Third Reich's leaders. The situation was critical. The fact that the Soviet Union was calmly dealing with the problems of art in Belorussia acquired special political significance.<sup>13</sup>

Despite having just mounted a first opera, the pathway to establishing repertoire for the forthcoming Belorussian dekada was rough. Throughout 1938, the Belorussian press had been littered with articles expressing frustration about the slow progress of preparing national repertoire.<sup>14</sup> As well as Tikotsky's opera, the first Belorussian ballet was also under development: Mikhail Kroshner's *The Nightingale* (1939). This was to be joined by two further operas: Turenkov's *The Flower of Happiness* and Anatol Bogatiryov's *The Quagmire* (*Drigva*, 1939), though by the 1940 dekada the latter was retitled *In the Forests of Polesye*. Amid the negative press about the opera house, Tikotsky, Kroshner, and Bogatiryov published an open letter in the summer of 1938, turning against the opera house's director Fyodor Yarikov, accusing him of a string of ineptitudes as well as hysterically pursuing a fictitious 'enemy group' in the theatre, in which Bogatiryov was supposedly implicated.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Bogatiryov and Turenkov spoke at the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the Belorussian SSR that year, personally addressing their grievances to the government.<sup>16</sup> Yarikov was soon replaced with his predecessor Oskar Gantman. But even under Gantman's leadership the opera house continued its dysfunctionality.

An instructive example of the chaos behind the scenes is revealed in Kroshner's correspondence with his former teacher Vasily Zolotaryov, himself a student of Rimsky-

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<sup>13</sup> Solodovnikov, 'Mi bili molodi togda... (vospominaniya)', in Yu. Ribakova and M. Selikh (eds), *Teatral'naya straniitsi: Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), 208.

<sup>14</sup> Alena Lisava, 'Vistayats' u gontsi dasyagnennyaw, al'bo Yashche raz pra pershiya belaruskiya operi', *Muzichnaya kul'tura Belarusi na skrizhavanni epokh*, T. S. Yakimenko (ed.) (Minsk: Belarusian State Academy of Music, 2011), 297. My thanks to Inessa Dvuzhlnaya for providing a Russian translation of this article.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 298–300.

<sup>16</sup> Samuil Ratner, 'V Belorussii', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/10–11, 60.



Korsakov and since 1933 a respected composition teacher at the Belorussian State Conservatoire in Minsk.<sup>17</sup> *The Nightingale* had occupied Kroshner since his graduation from the conservatoire in 1937, and it would be the second ballet to feature at a dekada (after Khachaturian's *Schast'ye*).<sup>18</sup> In a letter from early 1939, Kroshner describes a chaotic dekada meeting in an exasperated letter to Zolotaryov. Upon arrival, Kroshner had apparently been irritated to discover that the subject of the meeting was about the selection of dekada repertoire, which he apparently thought to have been settled. The composer was infuriated that authorities voiced concerns that there was insufficient folk content in the prospective dekada works, especially in *The Nightingale*, and suggested commissioning two further ballets for insurance. One was to be composed by the aforementioned Shcheglov (who would soon publish his scolding report about Poland) and the other would be to a libretto (as yet uncommissioned) by the celebrated writer Zmitrok Biadula, who had written the novel on which Kroshner's own ballet was based.<sup>19</sup> In his own account, Kroshner took the floor and stunned the leadership by asking facetiously 'if there was any contact in the committee between the music department and theatre?'. Kroshner then rebutted a claim (apparently propagated by Shcheglov) that the fast-up-and-coming Moscow composer Tikhon Khrennikov had endorsed the idea of Shcheglov's ballet. In fact, Kroshner quipped, this was actually 'a Shcheglov ballet commissioned by comrade Shcheglov'.<sup>20</sup> Kroshner also expressed doubt (with general agreement) that Biadula would agree to write a ballet libretto. The incensed composer continued to Zolotaryov:

Such are the faces of the would-be leaders who are going to show the art of the [Belorussian] republic. The leaders are willingly supporting [...] intrigues. But we will go to Comrade Ponomarenko<sup>21</sup> and tell him everything. Leaving the meeting, I calmly talked it out with Shcheglov. [...] When I left, I talked for about an hour with [the composer Issak] Lyuban, who turns out to be opposed to Shcheglov and does not trust him. Whom to believe of [the two of] them[?] Here is the situation for you, here are the conditions of work. I obtained a statement from Gantman about the message to write a ballet[;] he told me that everyone needs to be given a job and Shcheglov should write one. I then said that I would

<sup>17</sup> Zolotaryov's work would eventually be exhibited at the 1955 Belorussian dekada, in the form of his ballet *Hearts Aflame*.

<sup>18</sup> See Mikhail Kroshner, 'Belorusskiy balet', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 3 June 1940, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Kroshner to Zolotaryov, 2 March 1939. BGAMLI (Belorusskiy gosudarstvenniy arkhiv-muzey literatury i iskusstva) 143/1/361, 35<sup>v</sup>-36. I sincerely thank Inessa Dvuzhilnaya for providing scans of Kroshner's handwritten letters, which have never been published or transcribed.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 36<sup>v</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Panteleimon Ponomarenko (1902-84), a loyal Stalinist who ruled Belorussia as First Secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party from 1938 to 1947.

apply to another republic. Gantman did not like this either, but [*The Nightingale*] will be seen.<sup>22</sup>

Incidentally, Kroshner did go to another republic, and Gantman had to weather the humiliation that the first Belorussian ballet was performed in Ukraine six months before the Belorussian production was ready.<sup>23</sup> Shcheglov was ultimately represented at the dekada by his opera *Katerina*, based on a sixteenth-century plot in which the eponymous peasant-heroine rebels against Polish oppressors, which received a single concert performance at a minor Moscow venue. Although positively received, the production was far overshadowed by the Bolshoi showstoppers.<sup>24</sup> Shcheglov also supplied the customary *Ode to Stalin* for the final concert, although in his memoirs Ilya Musin recalled that the work was drastically cut at the last minute, such that only the opening bars and final chorus were performed, completely excising the intervening orchestral development.<sup>25</sup> After the war, Shcheglov followed the retreating Germans to Berlin, eventually emigrating to America.<sup>26</sup>

The state of dekada preparations was so dire that organizers failed to keep the scandal out of the papers. As the dekada approached, one member of the ballet theatre went to the press summarizing the state of affairs: ‘the ballet *The Nightingale* is subject to revision, the new version of the opera *Mikhas Podgorny* is only half-finished, *The Quagmire* also needs to be changed, and the opera *The Flower of Happiness* is in an embryonic state’. The writer also complained that rehearsals were poorly organized and managed, while the artistic leadership demonstrated ‘complacency bordering on irresponsibility’, often disrupting preparations by taking random weeks-long ‘business

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 37–37<sup>v</sup>. Kroshner’s sign off to Zolotaryov speaks to the intensity of his frustration: ‘My wife works and raises a little son, who gives me great joy and distracts me from the interminable troubles besieging me from enviers, idlers, and other bastards’. Ibid., 38.

<sup>23</sup> The premiere occurred in Odesa on 11 May 1939, while the Minsk production opened in November. See Nikolay Aladov, ‘Muzika belorusskoy respublik’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/9–10, 63.

<sup>24</sup> A. Shin, ‘*Katerina*’, *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 11 June 1940, 3. This is the only review of the production I have found.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Zaklyuchitel’nyy kontsert’, *Moskovskiy Bol’shevik*, 16 June 1940, 3; Ilya Musin, *Uroki zhizni: Vospominaniya dirizhera* (St. Petersburg: Dean-Adia-M, 1995), 172. Musin was particularly peeved, since guiding Shcheglov through the revisions had apparently been onerous.

<sup>26</sup> See Svetlana Zvereva, ‘Music, Culture and the Church in the USSR’, in David Fanning and Erik Levi (eds), *The Routledge Handbook to Music under German Occupation, 1938–1945* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 183.

trips'.<sup>27</sup> Lyuban (the composer who had privately bad-mouthed Shcheglov to Kroschner) published an article titled 'Eliminate Organizational Problems'. He complained that those preparing and overseeing the dekada works were failing to consider criticism from other composers and musicologists, and were rather marking time with cliquish 'incoherent discussions'.<sup>28</sup> Concerns about Gantman's leadership of the theatre percolated in government circles too. Two months before the dekada, a 'top secret' document was issued to Panteleimon Ponomarenko, who then governed Belorussia, complaining of Gantman's 'serious indiscretion'. The celebrated opera director Ilya Shlepyanov, whom Gantman had invited from Leningrad, was named as one of those offenders taking disruptive trips back to Russia on matters unrelated to the dekada. Much of the rest of Gantman's hired talent had apparently proven either incompetent or were simply not being assigned any work. The report also criticized the prodigal use of funds, especially in the reckless commissioning of musical works that were unlikely ever to be performed.<sup>29</sup>

The two favoured operas, *Mikhas Podgorny* and *In the Forests of Polesye*, were based on a contemporary topic, both set in the Revolution and subsequent Civil War. *Mikhas Podgorny* followed the established subgenre of Soviet opera in the mould of Dzerzhinsky's *Quiet Don* and Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko*, whereby a sleepy peasant village is swept up in revolutionary fervour, eventually triumphing over the enemy. But following its 1939 premiere drastic revisions were deemed necessary to prepare the opera for Moscow. The main criticism of the original version was its extreme length and complexity, and Tikotsky was charged with drastically cutting the music while the hodgepodge of characters was reduced from twenty-seven to sixteen.<sup>30</sup> Most dekada critics found Tikotsky's music poorly individualized, relying too heavily on 'kuchkisms' and nineteenth-century techniques.<sup>31</sup> The opera was grounded on a system of leitmotifs

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<sup>27</sup> V. Zalivako, 'Perestroit' rabotu v opernom teatre', unidentified newspaper clipping, RGALI 962/21/26, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Lyuban, 'Likvidiruyem organizatsionniye nepoladki', *ibid.* 174.

<sup>29</sup> The full report is quoted in Vital' Skalaban, 'Cherez god bila voyna', *Belarus' segodnya* <<https://www.sb.by/articles/cherez-god-byla-voyna.html>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>30</sup> Tikotskiy, 'Moya rabota nad operoy', in S. Danilan (ed.), *Mikhas' Podgorniy* (libretto) (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1940), 5–6.

<sup>31</sup> David Rabinovich, 'Khorosheye nachalo', *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 6 June 1940, 2; A. Livshits, 'Belorusskaya opera', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/9–10, 82. The composer Dmitry Kabalevsky

constructed from authentic Belorussian folk tunes, which divided opinion. Some, such as Kabalevsky, praised the composer's adapted use of the Wagnerian device. Others, such as musicologist David Rabinovich, dismissed them as a trifling academic exercise ('more a formal development technique than a real means for musical dramaturgy').<sup>32</sup>

Yakub Kolas's novella *The Quagmire*, about the struggle of the Belorussians during the Civil War, had been published in 1934. The young composer Anatol Bogatiryov claimed to have immediately seen its operatic potential while still a student of Zolotaryov at the Conservatoire, though he did not begin composing the work until after his 1937 graduation, from the same cohort as Kroshner.<sup>33</sup> Rather than concoct a network of genuine folk themes like Tikotsky, Bogatiryov's approach was less literal:

While working on the opera, I thought for a long time about the means of musical expression: should I use folklore as a ready-made material or try to create original music based on folk art, close in nature to Belorussian folksong? I chose the second way, considering it to be more independent and original.<sup>34</sup>

But even with the composer's attempt to capture more generic 'folksong intonations' (as Soviet critics came to put it in the standardized jargon coined by Boris Asafiev) the opera still bore obvious recourse to kuchkisms. For instance, the brief opening introduction followed by a lively female chorus bears obvious resemblance to the opening of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden* (see Example 5.1).<sup>35</sup>

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complained of the music's incessant 'Italianisms'. See Kabalevskiy, '*Mikhas' Podgorniy*', *Pravda*, 6 June 1940, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Kabalevskiy, '*Mikhas' Podgorniy*', 8; Rabinovich, '*Khorosheye nachalo*', 2.

<sup>33</sup> Bogatiryov, '*Opera V pushchakh Poles'ya*', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 10 June 1940, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Gorodinskiy, '*V pushchakh Poles'ya*', *Pravda*, 13 June 1940, 6.

**Example 5.1a.** Bogatiryov, *In the Forests of Polesye*, scene 1, chorus of girls.

The musical score for Example 5.1a consists of two systems of vocal and piano parts. The first system has a vocal line with the lyrics "Ti pri - di, ves - na zhe - lan - na - ya, pri - di," and a piano accompaniment. The second system has a vocal line with the lyrics "pes - ney\_ zhiz - ni, pes - ney vo - li, za - gu - di." and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a prominent tremolo in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand.

Come, much-anticipated spring, come,  
Buzzing with a song of life, a song of joy.

**Example 5.1b.** Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Snow Maiden*, prologue, chorus of birds.

The musical score for Example 5.1b consists of two systems of vocal and piano parts. The first system has a vocal line with the lyrics "Sbi - ra - lis' pti - - tsi, sbi - ra - lis'" and a piano accompaniment. The second system has a vocal line with the lyrics "pev - chi sta - da - mi, sta - da - - - mi." and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a prominent tremolo in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand.

Birds are gathered, singers are gathered, in droves, in droves.

The final opera on the bill was Aleksey Turenkov's *The Flower of Happiness* by Aleksey Turenkov, a student of Lyadov.<sup>36</sup> The opera follows a jilted love affair set against the backdrop of a folk legend, where on the night of the summer solstice (Ivan Kupala night) a mystical flower is said to grow. However, the work was no contender for top place amongst the dekada works. It did not aspire to grand opera, but rather evoked modest nineteenth-century folk operas like Lysenko's *Natalka Poltavka*. Even sympathetic voices admitted that the work lacked musical development and real drama, and that it was burdened by somewhat two-dimensional characters.<sup>37</sup>

Following the Minsk premiere of Kroshner's *The Nightingale* in November 1939, a largely positive review was published in *Sovetskaya muzika*, only faulting the composer's occasional proclivity for kuchkist cliches or ventures into the 'classical style' at the expense of folk colour.<sup>38</sup> Like the first production of Tikotsky's *Mikhas Podgorny*, the Minsk premiere resulted in demands for a slew of revisions. The fact that the production was a collaboration between two separate choreographers apparently affected the cohesiveness of the production.<sup>39</sup> But the music was also a cause for concern, as Kroshner publicly stated:

The final edition of the piano and orchestral score was formed as a result of a long search for a cohesive musical and theatrical style for the first Belorussian ballet. I will not hide the fact that on this path there were many mistakes and later significant changes, which have made the music unrecognizable compared with the original conception.<sup>40</sup>

The reception of *The Nightingale* at the dekada was broadly positive. Among the reviewers was Tikhon Khrennikov, the fabled supporter of Shcheglov's would-be ballet and future head of the Composers' Union. He registered his and fellow Muscovites'

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<sup>36</sup> Turenkov would ultimately receive a ten-year detention camp sentence in 1944 for 'assisting the German occupiers', although it is unknown how much of this sentence he served. See Klause, *Der Klang des Gulag: Musik und Musiker in den sowjetischen Zwangsarbeitslagern der 1920er- bis 1950er-Jahre* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2014), 610.

<sup>37</sup> See I. Mart'inov, 'Tvorchestvo A. Turenkova', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1940/8, 22–23; A. Livshits, 'Belorusskaya opera', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/9–10, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Aleksandr Livshits, 'Perviy belorusskiy balet "Solovey" – M. Kroshnera', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1939/11, 78–79. The ballet is set in the early nineteenth century. The plot centres around two lovers Zoska and the shepherd Simon (the latter nicknamed 'the nightingale' on account of his unparalleled ability to imitate birdsong). The local Polish lord tries to halt their marriage and trick Zoska into marrying his groundskeeper Makar. The day is saved by a peasant revolt, a favourite Soviet *deus ex machina*.

<sup>39</sup> Inessa Dvuzhlnaya, 'Kompozitor Mikhail Kroshner – uzbek Minskogo getto', *Chasopis natsional'noi muzichnoi akademii ukraïni imeni P. I. Chaykovskogo* 2014/4, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Mikhail Kroshner, 'Belorusskiy balet', 3.

collective 'surprise and admiration' for *The Nightingale*, especially for its 'freshness' and 'genuine nationality'.<sup>41</sup> Moisey Grinberg admired the ballet for its musical subtlety and cohesiveness as a national work: not just a mishmash of national tunes and dances, but offering a more holistic sense of folk character.<sup>42</sup> Any negative points were mostly attributed to the libretto, which was riven with plot holes and poorly developed characters.<sup>43</sup>

The Belorussian dekada was the most expensive festival yet, at around 11.4 million roubles, and was the only pre-war festival to include over a thousand participants.<sup>44</sup> The scale of the dekadas had now become enormous. When the Tajik dekada came to Moscow the following year, the production materials alone occupied twenty-three train carriages.<sup>45</sup> The menu of activities had also dramatically increased. The Belorussian dekada was the first to include non-musical plays, which would become a permanent fixture from then on. Musical activities ran the gamut from the usual operas and ballets at the Bolshoi to a 'roadshow of amateur art' which toured the clubs of Moscow, featuring popular hits of Mozart, Schubert, and Soviet songs, performed by the likes of amateur choirs, solo violinists, and balalaika players.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps as a result of the sheer number of participants, the cash award for the Belorussian participants was reduced to one month's salary, which had been fixed at two months' salary for previous festivals. The Belorussian dekada was also the first to feature children's choirs, who were paid in vouchers for holiday resorts.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, the Symphony Orchestra had also been preparing for dekada concerts for some time. Ilya Musin (later to become a highly celebrated conducting teacher) was appointed principal conductor of the Belorussian State Philharmonic in September 1937,

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<sup>41</sup> Khrennikov, 'Bogatstvo tvorchestkoy vidumki', *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 10 June 1940, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Grinberg, 'Solovey', *Pravda*, 11 June 1940, 6.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Viktor Iving, 'Solovey', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 5 June 1940, 3.

<sup>44</sup> RGALI 962/21/1, 3<sup>v</sup>. The only exception was a dekada of Leningrad music held in Moscow a month prior to the Belorussian festival. The Leningrad event included over 2,700 participants and was held vaguely under the auspices of the national dekadas, though it was not as well publicized and not routinely included in later published accounts. See *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1305, 80.

<sup>46</sup> For plans on the roadshow, see GARF R-5474/21/149, 10–28.

<sup>47</sup> RGALI 962/21/26, 122. The same reduced award scheme of one month's salary was continued for the following Buryat-Mongolian dekada. See RGALI 962/21/33, 134.

with a view to preparing for the dekada. Musin was given the hapless task of selecting Belorussian repertoire for the dekada's final concert. Among the hopeful contenders were eight symphonies and dozens of smaller-scale overtures and suites.<sup>48</sup> In his memoirs, Musin recalled being unimpressed by most Belorussian composers' orchestration abilities, save for Tikotsky, Zolotaryov, and 'to some extent' Shcheglov.<sup>49</sup> Multiple auditions were held to select an overture for the prestigious final concert, but even Tikotsky's submission was summarily rejected. Musin found many Belorussian composers to be diva-ish and stubborn in the face of criticism. When the composer Nikolay Aladov was asked to remove a particularly dissonant chord in a chamber ensemble piece for children, he retorted that he would do so only in the face of a direct government resolution. He had his comeuppance when Ponomarenko attended a rehearsal and stopped proceedings to chastise Aladov for 'discrediting children' by making them 'play wrong notes everywhere'.<sup>50</sup>

Alterations continued to be made right up to the eve of the concert. As well as the aforementioned drastic cut to Shcheglov's Stalin Ode, the Queen of the Night's aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute* was suddenly added to show off the star soprano Larisa Aleksandrovskaya.<sup>51</sup> Musin also recalled a surprising intervention during the final concert while he was backstage during an item he was not conducting. He was approached by a senior military officer who reported that 'Vyacheslav Mikhailovich [Molotov] and Lazar Moiseyevich [Kaganovich] were not at the performance of *The Flower of Happiness* (Turenkov's opera) and ask for a performance of Marisa's aria'. Despite the fact that Molotov and Kaganovich were from Stalin's closest inner circle, Musin was nonetheless hesitant:

I replied that the orchestra had not rehearsed this piece and that it would be impossible to perform it. Besides, there were no musical materials. The military man said something else to convince me, but I did not agree. A few minutes later he returned and again said that Molotov and Kaganovich really wanted to hear this aria. Responding to my objections, he said that he would take responsibility for the possibility of any problems in the execution.

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<sup>48</sup> Il'ya Musin, 'Simfonicheskiy orkestr', *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 4 June 1940, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Musin, *Uroki zhizni*, 171.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 173. Musin misremembers her name as Alekseyeva.



He persuaded me so much that I agreed. I called the librarian and asked him to get the opera parts.<sup>52</sup>

None of the press reports of the final concert mention the surprise performance from Aleksandrovskaya, so it is unclear precisely which aria this might have been. Musin clearly misremembered the details, since the role of Marisa, sung by Aleksandrovskaya, was actually from Tikotsky's *Mikhas Podgorny*. One can establish that Molotov and Kaganovich indeed missed Turenkov's *The Flower of Happiness*, which was attended on 7 June by Stalin, Zhdanov, and Voroshilov, but neither is there a record of any government presence for *Mikhas Podgorny*. We may surmise that Molotov or Kaganovich had read Kabalevsky's review in *Pravda*, which especially raved about Marisa's 'particularly well-written [...] great dramatic aria in the second act'.<sup>53</sup> The aria in question opens by riffing on a soulful minor folk theme as the lead female character bemoans the tragedy of peasant life, gradually building to a determined climax (Example 5.2).

**Example 5.2.** Tikotsky, *Mikhas Podgorny*, act 2, scene 3, Marisa's aria.

The musical score for Marisa's aria is presented in two systems. The first system begins with a **Moderato** tempo marking and a *8va* instruction for the vocal line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor). The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The tempo then changes to **Più lento**. The second system starts at measure 7, marked **Sostenuto assai**. It includes parts for **Cor ang.** (English Horn) and **Timp.** (Timpani). Dynamics include *poco sf*, *p*, *sf*, and *sf*. The score shows a gradual build-up in intensity and a change in the piano accompaniment's texture.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> On government attendance at *The Flower of Happiness*, see *Izvestiya*, 8 June 1940, 1; see also Kabalevskiy, 'Mikhas' Podgorniy', 8. The Politburo were then encumbered with a high workload overseeing the annexation and Sovietization of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which perhaps explains the absence. See Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting For Hitler, 1928-1941* (London: Penguin, 2017), 772-71.

13 *p*

Pla-chet rech - ka s ru-chey-ka - mi, vo - da po - mu - ti - las'. Za - li - la - sya

18

ya sle - za - mi, go - re na - va - li - los'. A!

(Harp)

The river weeps forth streams, the water becomes murky.  
I burst into tears, grief is overwhelming.

Musin's anecdote gives some indication that the Politburo members genuinely invested themselves in the *dekada* works for which they had signed off vast quantities of state funding. It seems likely that the request directed towards Musin constituted one last chance to see Aleksandrovskaya in action before the Politburo endorsed her prestigious Order of Lenin, which was customarily announced the following day.<sup>54</sup> In broader terms, this was the first return to Eastern Europe since the Ukrainian *dekada* of 1936. Unlike the Ukrainians, the Belorussians were able to make the most of long-term preparations to put up four major original works, three on a contemporary theme. While the Ukrainian *dekada* four years earlier had been a slapdash experiment come good, *dekadas* had rapidly gained the status of a prestigious cultural phenomenon, and comparison shows that their organizational practices were now becoming burdened by bureaucratic stonewalling and professional jealousies.

<sup>54</sup> She was the only musician to receive the Order of Lenin, alongside three actors from the drama theatre. See *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, 25 June 1940, 2.

## Buryat-Mongolia

**Box 5.2.** Principal productions of the Buryat-Mongolian dekada, 20–27 October 1940.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
21, 22*, 26	Pavel Berlinsky, <i>Bair</i> (1938, rev. 1940 by Baudorzhi Yampilov)	Music drama
24	Viktor Moroshkin, <i>Ėrzhèn</i> (1940)	Music drama
20, 23, 25*	Markian Frolov, <i>Ėnkhè-Bulat bator</i> [Ėnkhè the Steel Warrior] (1940)	Opera
27*	Concert	

\* *Attended by Stalin.*

The most surprising aspect of the Buryat-Mongolian dekada, which opened on 20 October 1940, was that it happened at all. Buryat-Mongolia was, after all, an Autonomous Republic (hierarchically below a Union Republic), and not even one of the larger ones at that. The region had remained neutral during the Civil War but fell under Bolshevik control in 1920. It was soon merged into a new Far Eastern Republic, conceived as a buffer state between the Soviet Union and Japanese-controlled territory in Eastern Siberia.<sup>55</sup> In 1932 Japan invaded a substantial region of northeastern China and established the puppet state of Manchuria, leading to seven years of border clashes between the Soviets and the Japanese Kwantung army. In 1939 the conflict came to a head in Battle of Khalkhin Gol (called the Nomonhan incident by the Japanese), which led to the humiliating defeat of the Kwantung army by September.

A week after the Japanese officially signed the ceasefire, the Politburo passed a secret order mandating the KDI to organize a Buryat-Mongolian dekada the following year.<sup>56</sup> The KDI deputy chairman Solodovnikov recalled in his memoirs that the decision was spurred by a necessity to show ‘the calmness of our country’ near the borders of the Japanese puppet state.<sup>57</sup> Similar gestures from Moscow had been made before. For instance, when Japanese-Soviet relations sharply deteriorated in January 1936, a large

<sup>55</sup> See James Minehan, *Encyclopaedia of Stateless Nations*, 4 vols (London: Greenwood, 2002), I: 345, and for a fuller account: Melissa Chakars, *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia: Transformation in Buryatia* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 46–53.

<sup>56</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1236, 183.

<sup>57</sup> Solodovnikov, ‘Mi bili molodī togda...’, 208.

delegation of Buryat-Mongolians was received by Stalin in the Kremlin, where artists were awarded the Order of the Red Banner.<sup>58</sup> Curiously, the victory over Japan was barely mentioned in dekada literature. Instead, when the festival was publicly announced, the twenty-year anniversary of the Bolshevik takeover was touted as the primary reason for holding a large-scale celebration of Buryat-Mongolian art.<sup>59</sup> Officials were quick to assert that the autonomous republic could not be held to the same artistic standards as the larger Union Republics. Semyon Ignatev, then first secretary of the Buryat-Mongolian regional party, wrote after the dekada that 'we all understand perfectly well that our dekada, unlike the others, is in fact only the beginning of a very large, difficult, and accountable project to create Buryat-Mongolian art that is national in form and socialist in content'.<sup>60</sup>

The Politburo initially approved a Buryat-Mongolian dekada in a resolution dated 1 October 1939, and 5 million roubles were granted to fund preparations. Unable to realize their ambitions with this budget, the Buryats requested an additional 3.5 million in July 1940, and after a Politburo debate, Molotov signed off a further 2 million roubles.<sup>61</sup> Preparations began at pace, and Ignatev himself accompanied a fact-finding mission to Kyrgyzstan to investigate their recent dekada.<sup>62</sup> The usual flurry of prominent artistic consultants was dispatched from Moscow. Iosif Tumanov, director of the Stanislavsky Theatre in Moscow, was appointed the dekada's artistic director, and the scarcely less famed choreographer Igor Moiseyev was also appointed. Musical figures dispatched included the musicologist Georgiy Polyanovsky and the violinist Nikolai Marotin.<sup>63</sup>

In 1939 the composer Markian Frolov was invited to write the dekada's headline opera by his former composition teacher Reinhold Glière, in the latter's capacity as head

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<sup>58</sup> V. Shestakovich, 'Artist Ch. G. Geninov', RGALI 962/21/33, 1. For more on the massive delegation from Buryat-Mongolia, see *Pravda*, 30 January 1936, *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> See, for instance, 'Dekada buryat-molngol'skogo iskusstva v Moskve', *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 4 March 1940, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Ignat'yev, 'Noviye zadachi buryat-mongol'skogo iskusstva', *Buryat-mongol'skaya pravda*, 31 October 1940, 1.

<sup>61</sup> RGASPI 17/163/1272, 225.

<sup>62</sup> Yana Zhabayeva, 'Stanovleniye i razvitiye professional'noy muzikal'noy kul'turi Buryatii (1923–1945gg.)', unpublished doctoral dissertation (Eastern-Siberian State Technical University, 2006), 145.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

of the Moscow Composers' Union.<sup>64</sup> After his early education and career in Kyiv and Saint Petersburg, Frolov had relocated permanently to Sverdlovsk in 1928. He had headed a campaign to establish a local conservatoire, and was appointed the first director of the Ural State Conservatoire on its founding in 1934. However, at the height of the purges in 1937, Frolov was denounced as an 'enemy of the people'. A brief spell spent in China during his youth was deemed sufficient to accuse him of being a Japanese spy, and Frolov was expelled from the party and had his directorship of the conservatoire rescinded. Only a direct intervention from Glière and Nikolay Myaskovsky saved Frolov from more serious reprisals, and he was able to maintain his position as a teacher of composition.<sup>65</sup> Contemporary accounts gloss over this calamitous episode, or suggest that the termination of his leadership at the conservatoire in December 1937 was voluntary, such that he could 'devote himself entirely to creative and pedagogical work'.<sup>66</sup> The musicologist Irina Vinkevich has more plausibly suggested that Frolov's acceptance of the Buryat-Mongolian commission was influenced by a desire to escape a city in which he no longer felt welcome.<sup>67</sup>

Although Soviet commentators generally dismissed pre-Revolutionary Buryatia as stifled by tsarist autocracy and the religious tyranny of Tibetan Buddhism, there had been signs of progress by the turn of the century.<sup>68</sup> The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway had led to rapid urban growth of the republic's capital Verkhneudinsk (renamed Ulan-Ude in 1934), and with it a burgeoning theatre-loving intelligentsia. By 1931 a combined music and theatre school had been established in the capital, whose first cohort of music students graduated in 1934.<sup>69</sup> But those aspiring to a conservatoire education still had to make the 3000-kilometre trip to study in Sverdlovsk, where Frolov had taught several budding Buryat composers. While composing his dekada opera *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator*

<sup>64</sup> Georgiy Polyanovskiy, 'Kompozitorī Buryat-Mongolii', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1940/10, 43

<sup>65</sup> See Irina Vinkevich, 'Markian Frolov: Muzikal'nīy portret na fone épokhi', *Kul'tura Urala*, 2 December 2021 <<https://uralcult.ru/articles/music/i132502/>> (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>66</sup> Polyanovskiy, 'Kompozitorī Buryat-Mongolii', 43; see also Igor' Bēlza, 'Vīdayushchiysya muzikant Urala: Pamyati Markiana Frolova', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1950/4, 72–75.

<sup>67</sup> Vinkevich, 'Markian Frolov: Paradoksī sud'bi', public lecture, 20 December 2021 <<https://youtu.be/of1ptXUe5sQ>>, especially from 36.00 to 40.00 (accessed 9 August 2022).

<sup>68</sup> For a typically skewed Soviet account, see Pavel Berlinskiy, 'Muzikal'naya zhizn' Buryat-Mongol'skoy respubliki', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1934/7, 46–52.

<sup>69</sup> See Boris Bazarov (ed.), *Istoriya Buryatii*, 3 vols (Ulan-Ude: BNTs SO RAN, 2011), III: 163–65.

(*Ėnkhé the Steel Warrior*),<sup>70</sup> Frolov collaborated particularly with his Sverdlovsk student Dandar Ayusheyev for his authority on Buryat music, whom he credited in the published score as a ‘musical consultant on folklore’.<sup>71</sup> However, the opera’s problematic creative gestation was a matter of public knowledge. The Buryat playwright Namzhil Boldano completed the tragic play *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator* in 1938, which was adapted into a music drama the following year. When preparations for the dekada began, Boldano was asked to adapt his play into an opera libretto for which Frolov would provide the music.<sup>72</sup> But Boldano was not in his element writing an opera text, whose libretto was subject to five rewrites. Progress was also hampered by Frolov’s inability to read the Buryat language, and the need to translate each draft into Russian further hampered progress.<sup>73</sup> Frolov’s music followed a somewhat classical framework, composed entirely of arias, choruses, and ensemble pieces.<sup>74</sup> It also ploughed the same furrow of Western and Russian orientalist signifiers upon which most dekada works had come to rely. The opening gesture of act 3, for instance, blends the snaking quasi-improvisatory melody line of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sheherazade* with the motoric rhythmic ostinatos of Debussy’s second Arabesque (Example 5.3).

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<sup>70</sup> The premise of the opera is as follows. The cruel Buman Khan keeps the people in fear with a sword of formidable power. The Khan’s rebellious son Ėnkhé Bator steals the sword and asks the blacksmith Darkhan to transfer its powerful tip into the heads of his arrows. Ėnkhé is caught and imprisoned. He soon learns that his true father is in fact the national hero Solbon Bator, who has been imprisoned for the last twenty years. Meanwhile, the land is overrun with enemies, and the Khan’s only chance of subduing the invaders is to free his adopted son. Ėnkhé is placed in charge of the army, under whose leadership the enemies are overthrown. Buman Khan is thrown into prison, Solbon Bator is released, and Ėnkhé is heralded a hero.

<sup>71</sup> Frolov, ‘Stremeniye k muzikal’noy kul’ture’, *Moskovskiy Bol’shevik*, 20 October 1940, 3; Frolov, *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator: Izbrannyye otrivki* (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1940). Ayusheyev graduated from the conservatoire in 1943, a year before Frolov’s premature death. He became head of the Buryat Composer’ Union in 1946, a role he held for seventeen years.

<sup>72</sup> Namzhil Boldano, ‘Moy put’’, *Buryat-Mongol’skaya pravda*, 29 October 1940, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Namzhil Boldano and G. Tsidenzhapov, ‘Pervaya natsional’naya opera’, *Buryat-Mongol’skaya Pravda*, 20 October 1940, 3.

<sup>74</sup> This episodic structure seemed not to undermine the opera’s fluid dramatic development for the opera’s dekada critics. One reviewer noted that ‘In each of the six scenes, the music develops in an uninterrupted manner’. Semyon Korev, ‘Ėnkhé-Bulat bator’, *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 22 October 1940, 3.

**Example 5.3a.** Frolov, *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator*, act 3, scene 1, opening.

The score for Example 5.3a is for a piano piece in 3/4 time, marked **Largo**. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of triplets. The upper staff begins with a *espr.* (espressivo) marking and a **f** (forte) dynamic. The music is characterized by a series of triplets, with dynamics shifting to *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *p* (piano). A *poco sosten.* (poco sostenuto) marking is present. The piece concludes with an *accelerando* marking and a **rit.** (ritardando) section. The lower staff provides harmonic support with chords and bass lines, including a VI<sup>7</sup> chord. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 5 and the second system starting at measure 6.

**Example 5.3b.** Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sheherazade*, i, bb. 14–15.

The score for Example 5.3b is for a violin solo in 4/4 time, marked **Lento**. The upper staff is for the **Vln solo** (violin solo), marked *espr.* (espressivo). The music consists of a series of triplets, with dynamics ranging from **f** (forte) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The lower staff is for the **Harp**, marked *colla parte* (colla parte). The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 14 and the second system starting at measure 15. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

**Example 5.3c.** Debussy, *Deux arabesques*, ii, opening.

The score for Example 5.3c is for a piano piece in 3/4 time, marked **Allegretto scherzando**. The upper staff begins with a **p et très léger** (piano and very light) marking. The music is characterized by a series of triplets, with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The lower staff provides harmonic support with chords and bass lines. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 5 and the second system starting at measure 6. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

The Buryats had only a year to prepare their dekada, and the first hurdle was assembling an army of performers, and the process of rapid professionalization was

similar to the lead up to the Uzbek dekada (see Chapter 3). Twelve amateur regional competitions involving around 1,500 participants were held across the republic, and the best were recruited to participate in the dekada. The final pool of *dekadniki* constituted an unlikely crowd of former milkmaids, collective farmers, and industrial workers.<sup>75</sup> The KDI's deputy chairman Solodovnikov recalled some unease in the Committee about the state of the arts in Buryatia. On the eve of Solodovnikov's departure with a brigade to Ulan-Ude to assess the dekada productions, Khrapchenko pessimistically asked that he 'try to bring good performances from Buryatia' so that 'our fortunes might yet recover'.<sup>76</sup> When Solodovnikov arrived in Ulan-Ude (accompanied, among others, by the musicologist Moisey Grinberg) he found rehearsals taking place in a freezing auditorium on a makeshift wooden stage, since no permanent stage in the city approached the size of Moscow's Bolshoi. Nonetheless the quality of the productions was apparently an unexpected relief.<sup>77</sup>

Two days before *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator* was due for its dekada premiere, a review performance was shown in Moscow to a select audience. Immediately following the performance, Khrapchenko chaired a meeting of top composers to garner their impressions, at which verbatim minutes were recorded. Yury Shaporin began proceedings, complaining 'I have come to the theatre today after a working day; I am tired so will be brief', but nonetheless declared *Ėnkhé* 'a brilliant, masterful work' especially praising the dance passages, though admitted some flaws in the performance. The composing duo Vlasov and Feré chimed their support for Shaporin, but expanded on some shortcomings in the production. Vlasov noted some weaknesses in the chorus, where male parts tended to over-force their voices and lacked dynamic range. Feré seconded Vlasov's point and suggested the need for an additional rehearsal and further vocal training. Frolov's former composition teacher Glière added nothing except to second Shaporin's glowing comments.<sup>78</sup> However, Frolov must have been heartened to read

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<sup>75</sup> See Ignat'yev, 'Noviye zadachi buryat-mongol'skogo iskusstva', 1; Zhabayeva, 'Stanovleniye i razvitiye professional'noy muzikal'noy kul'turī Buryatii', 145–46.

<sup>76</sup> Solodovnikov, 'Mi bili molodi togda...', 203.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>78</sup> RGALI 962/21/33, 9–11.



Glière's firm approval of his opera in the press, to the effect that it was 'without qualification, a truly great musical work'.<sup>79</sup>

Three performances of *Ėnkhe* were mounted at the dekada, on 20, 23, and 25 July; the first two on the Bolshoi's smaller second stage, the last being transferred to the main stage.<sup>80</sup> Stalin attended the last performance, accompanied by Molotov, Voroshilov, Andreyev, Mikoyan, Beria, and Malenkov. The official report of the visit suggested that the humble provincial production lived up to the grandeur of its surroundings, being even more effective on the main stage.<sup>81</sup> The critical reception of *Ėnkhe* rendered it the most positively received dekada opera by a non-native composer so far, even matching the critical hype of the Armenian dekada production of Spendiarov's *Almast* eight months earlier (see Chapter 4). Reviewers especially praised Frolov's subtle use of leitmotifs and folk materials.

Semyon Korev, for instance, praised the composer's free use of folksong without resorting to 'excessive direct quotation', such nuances placing the work among 'the most significant works of Soviet opera'.<sup>82</sup> Aleksandr Shaverdyan praised the use of folk materials along similar lines, declaring that Frolov had transcended the folksong synthesis of other dekada operas: 'The composer enriches and creatively transforms this [folksong] material, boldly surpassing the standards and clichés that have shaped [other] work on folk musical themes'.<sup>83</sup> Shaverdyan also agreed that Frolov 'succeeded in the musical characterization of the main characters' whose 'musical portraits are vibrant, individualized, and dynamic'. But Shaverdyan's highest praise was for Frolov personally:

Musically speaking, the opera *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator* is a work of great artistic value. The opera presents Markian Frolov's compositional physiognomy in a most favourable light. It is significant that this cultured and serious musician found himself working on Buryat-Mongolian national music, which has conditioned the ideological aspiration and significance of his work. Frolov's experience, carefully selecting the valuable elements of folksong and creatively using the traditions of classical opera, is very positive. The opera *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator* is a valuable contribution to Soviet multinational operatic culture.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Gliër, 'Zriteli o spektakle *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator*', *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 21 October 1940, 3.

<sup>80</sup> RGALI 962/21/1, 14.

<sup>81</sup> 'Bol'shoy uspekh operi *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator*', *Buryat-Mongol'skaya pravda*, 27 October 1940, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Semyon Korev, 'Ėnkhé-Bulat bator', 3.

<sup>83</sup> Shaverdyan, 'Ėnkhé-Bulat bator', *Izvestiya*, 23 October 1940, 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Frolov and his librettist Baldano each received the Order of the Red Banner of Labour.<sup>85</sup> In the composer's unpublished autobiography, he would cite the final reception as the happiest day of his life.<sup>86</sup> Frolov's opera cast shadows beyond its dekada production in Moscow. Marina Frolova-Walker has shown that during discussions on awarding the first ever round of Stalin Prizes, *Ėnkhé-Bulat bator* was the committee's favourite contender in the national opera category on the grounds of musical merit. The award was reluctantly given to Hajibeyov's *Kyor-ogli* only since the Azerbaijani entry was the work of a legitimately native composer rather than a Russian visitor.<sup>87</sup>

For the Buryat-Mongolian republic, the dekada was undoubtedly a success. As well as placing the autonomous republic into the consciousness of Muscovites, the Buryats returned home with a more developed artistic infrastructure, and a conviction to produce more operas, both of the original national variety and translations of classic operas into the Buryat language.<sup>88</sup> But as many republics found in the aftermath of their dekadas, maintaining growth in the arts proved a harder matter, especially so far as finance was concerned. The dekada success proved a handy bargaining chip for securing further financial support from Moscow. The year after the dekada the Buryats drew up a budget of 685,000 roubles to fund arts projects, substantially exceeding Sovnarkom's allocation which had been below 500,000 roubles. The Buryats wrote to Moscow, citing the successes of the dekada, and warned that a failure to redress the deficit would result in job losses, to which Sovnarkom dutifully promised another half-million roubles.<sup>89</sup> On another occasion that year, the Buryat-Mongolian Central Committee again pestered Sovnarkom, complaining that the construction of a new theatre which had been promised at the dekada had used up its 400,000 roubles of funding; Sovnarkom immediately found

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<sup>85</sup> RGALI 962/21/33, 141.

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Bélza, 'Vidayushchiysya muzikant Urala', 73. Bélza claims to quote from Frolov's autobiography, but makes no reference to a source. Frolov's autobiography is also quoted in I. Matskevich, 'Tvorchestvo Markiana Frolova', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1947/3, 20. The document is likely preserved in the composer's personal papers, which remain in private hands.

<sup>87</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 49.

<sup>88</sup> Ignat'yev, 'Noviye zadachi buryat-mongol'skogo iskusstva', 1. The following year the Buryats produced Buryat language productions of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, and Asafiev's ballet *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. See GARF R-5446/25/134, 173.

<sup>89</sup> GARF R-5446/25/134, 173–71 (reverse paginated).

an additional 150,000 to see the theatre to completion.<sup>90</sup> Evidently, the promised ‘fraternal’ assistance from Moscow would continue in fits and starts.

## Tajikistan

**Box 5.3.** Principal productions of the Tajik dekada, 12–20 April 1941.

Performance Dates	Work	Genre
12, 19	Sergey Balasanyan, <i>Vosstaniye Vosé</i> [The Uprising of Vosé] (1939, rev. 1958)	Opera
13*, 14	Sergey Balasanyan and Samuil Urbakh <i>Lola</i> [The Tulip] (1939)	‘Musical performance in two parts’
15, 16	Sergey Balasanyan, <i>Kuznets Kova</i> [Kova the Blacksmith] (1941)	Opera
17*, 18	Aleksandr Lensky, <i>Dve rozi</i> [Two Roses] (1941)	Ballet
20*	Concert	

\* Attended by Stalin.

Founded in 1936 as the dekadas were getting off the ground, the Tajik music theatre had grown rapidly and by 1937 its level of skill was sufficient to mount productions of Hajibeyov’s *Arshin Mal Alan* and Glière’s *Gyulsara*, each staged in parallel with their respective dekada productions in Moscow.<sup>91</sup> While Tajikistan prepared for its dekada, familiar mechanisms were co-opted to promote the republic’s receptivity to European culture. To this end, a ‘dekada’ devoted to the ‘heroic Western music of the last century’ was organised in 1938, bringing Beethoven, Wagner, and Berlioz to the Tajik capital.<sup>92</sup> The press coverage of the Tajik dekada in Moscow, whose delayed arrival came in April 1941, took pains to show how Soviet investment was helping the republic overcome its cultural ‘backwardness’. One article boasted that government spending on the arts in Tajikistan would reach eighteen million roubles that year, seven million up from two years prior.<sup>93</sup> As ever, the key to cultural progress, Muscovites were told, lay in the enmeshing of orient and occident:

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>91</sup> Zoya Tadzhiikova, ‘Tadzhikskaya SSR’, in Yuriy Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya*, II: 432. R. Korokh, ‘Pervaya tadzhikskaya opera’, *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 7 April 1941, 2.

<sup>92</sup> See Sergei Balasanyan, ‘Dekada geroicheskoy muziki’, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 16 May 1938, 3.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Dekada tadzhikskogo iskusstva’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 13 April 1941, 1.

Professional musical art is developing astonishingly quickly in the [Tajik] republic. Overcoming hostile 'theories' about the incompatibility of national characteristics with global art forms, [and] with the help of Great Russian culture, talented Tajik musicians have already created two operas – *Vosé's Uprising* and *Kova the Blacksmith* – as well as the ballet *Two Roses*.<sup>94</sup>

As with preparations for the Kazakh, Uzbek and Kyrgyz dekada discussed in precious chapters, the Tajiks had a heavy dose of 'Great Russian' support in preparing dekada works. The two operas were by Sergey Balasanyan (1902–82), who was born and raised in an Armenian expatriate community in the Central-Asian city of Ashgabat, which after the Soviet takeover became the capital of Turkmenistan. Balasanyan studied at the conservatoire in Yerevan, then in Leningrad, and finally in Moscow, where he graduated from Kabalevsky's composition class in 1935.<sup>95</sup> The composer accepted a position in Tajikistan in 1936, where he composed the musical play *Lola* and the two operas *Vosé's Uprising* (*Vosstaniye Vosé*) and *Kova the Blacksmith* (*Kuznets Kova*). In 1940 he was named head of the Tajik branch of the Composers' Union, though the tenure was cut short by his permanent return to Moscow in 1943. The composer of *Two Roses*, Aleksandr Lensky (1910–78), was Russian born and had studied composition and conducting at the Moscow Conservatoire in the late 1930s. In 1937 Balasanyan wrote to his friend Aram Khachaturian asking for his impression of Lensky shortly ahead of the composer's relocation to Tajikistan. His reply was damning: 'This is not one of the brightest students at the conservatory, a rather epigonistic mediocrity. I think if you seriously consider who to bring [to Tajikistan] for creative work you could find more successful candidates in Moscow'.<sup>96</sup>

Balasanyan's first Tajik venture *Lola* (1939) was co-written with the composer Samuil Urbakh (1908–69).<sup>97</sup> Modestly titled a 'musical performance in two parts' rather than an opera, it was described in promotional materials for the dekada performance as a

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> For the most in-depth biographical information on Balasanyan, see the various reminiscences presented in Karina Balasanyan (ed.), *S. A. Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma: k 100-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya kompozitora* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2003), 69ff.

<sup>96</sup> Letter of 23 April 1937, Balasanyan (ed.), *Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma*, 264.

Balasanyan seems to have asked if Khachaturian himself would be prepared to work in Tajikistan, an offer he declined owing to his busy work schedule in Moscow.

<sup>97</sup> Urbakh was a Polish-born composer who studied with Shebalin at the Moscow Conservatoire, graduating in 1937. He immediately accepted a position in Tajikistan, though returned permanently to Moscow after the dekada. He later scored a success with the first Tajik comic opera *Bibi and Bobo* (1959).

'theatrical concert'.<sup>98</sup> The thin-on-plot premise focuses on a group of collective farmers preparing for a spring festival, and musically the work comprises almost entirely of folksong arrangements. It may be seen from numbers like 'Kumri's song' that in his first Tajik composition Balasanyan was relying on time-worn kuchkist signifiers of the orient such as persistent bass ostinatos and droning dominant pedal-points.<sup>99</sup> As with Vlasov and Feré's early Kyrgyz works, Balasanyan made similarly hackneyed use of consecutive fourths and fifths, which native Tajik musicians would come to wryly dub 'correct' music (Example 5.4).<sup>100</sup>

**Example 5.4a.** Balasanyan and Ubrakh, *Lola*, 'Kumri's Song', opening.

*Allegretto, non troppo. Grazioso.*

The musical score is in 6/8 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part features a persistent bass ostinato of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a droning dominant pedal-point of dotted half notes (F#4, C5). The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'Mo-ya ra-dost', ti serd-tse'. The second system starts at measure 6 and continues the vocal line with lyrics 'mne so-zhgla. Mo-ya ra-dost', ti serd-tse mne so-zhgla.' The piano accompaniment remains consistent with the first system.

<sup>98</sup> Tadjikova, 'Tadjikskaya SSR', 436.

<sup>99</sup> This was one of Balasanyan's contributions, a straightforward arrangement of a Tajik folksong. See the foreword by Aleksandr Shaverdyan in Balasanyan and Urbakh, *Lola: Izbranniye otrivki* (Moscow and Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1941), 6.

<sup>100</sup> Viktor Vinogradov, 'Tvorchestvo kompozitorov respubliki Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana', in Vera Vasina-Grossman (ed.), *Sovetskaya muzika: Teoreticheskiye i kriticheskiye stat'i* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1954), 457. See discussion in Chapter 4.

**Example 5.4b.** Balasanyan and Ubrakh, *Lola*, 'Kumri's Song', bb. 31–42.

31 *pp*  
 Mo-ya ra-dost', ti\_serd tse\_ mne so-zhgla. Mo-ya ra-dost', ti\_serd tse\_ mne so zhgla.

37  
 Ti ne smot-rish' mne\_y och-i, ti\_ush-la. Ti ne smot-rish' mne\_y och-i, ti\_ush-la.

My joy, you have set my heart aflame. You do not look me in the eye, you have gone.

However, it seems that Balasanyan soon began seeking more musically nuanced approaches. An October 1939 letter from Sergey Gorodetsky, a prominent former Symbolist poet who wrote both Russian texts for *Vosé's Uprising* and *Kova the Blacksmith*, demonstrates that Balasanyan was seeking to move beyond kuchkist orientalism.<sup>101</sup> Gorodetsky gave short shrift to the approach of Ivan Dzerzhinsky, who had received rapturous official support in 1936 for his 'song-opera' *Quiet Don*, only to be pummelled with widespread distain the following year for its sequel *Virgin Soil Upturned*. The letter was sent the day after two noteworthy events: Gorodetsky's viewing of the Armenian dekada production of Tigranyan's *Anush* and the premiere of *Vosé's Uprising* in Stalinabad:

How nice it would be if you could write down at least briefly how you worked on the music, how you define your method. How does one translate folk music of the East into the language of our orchestras and the five-line stave? We have discussed this more than once. You are closer to folk melos than, for example, Tigranyan. How do you see the differences between the methods of *Vosé* and *Anush*? And how does this relate to Rimsky-Korsakov's approach? It seems to me very important to discuss all this. New Russian opera based on folk music is not far off, and everyone is giving in to the Dzerzhinsky 'method', delivering folk melodies with a few distortions and without any attention to

<sup>101</sup> Gorodetsky was an experienced producer of opera librettos, most notably *Ivan Susanin*, the ideologically sanitized version of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*. For a detailed discussion, see Frolova-Walker, 'The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. Ivan Susanin', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18/2 (2006), 200–07. He also produced a short pamphlet of Tajik music in 1944. Gorodetskiy, *Muzika Tadzhikistana* (Stalinabad: Gosizdat Tadzhikistana, 1944).

subtleties and nuances, which are no less present in Russian [folk] music than in its Eastern variant.<sup>102</sup>

Khachaturian's 'epigonistic mediocrity' Lensky also had ties to the periphery, though not to Central Asia. He was born in Mordovia (an autonomous republic within Russia) to Ukrainian parents, and studied at the Moscow Conservatoire with Genrikh Litinsky, a student of Glière, finishing in 1937 with his graduation piece *The Gadfly*, an opera based on his own libretto. He immediately accepted a summons to work in Tajikistan, where he worked in the Music and Drama Theatre alongside curating a substantial folksong collection published in 1941. In 1938 he founded the Tajik Orchestra of Folk Instrumentalists, which began with seventeen folk musicians who could not read staff notation and grew into a 75-piece philharmonic orchestra by the 1940s.<sup>103</sup>

Cast in a similar mould to Glière's *Gyulsara*, Lensky's ballet *Two Roses* typified the similar themes of anti-religion and female emancipation that characterized other dekada works from the Central Asian republics. The villains of the work are the Basmachi movement, an anti-Russian Islamic movement that appeared in 1916 in opposition to Tsarist conscription, who were violently quashed by the Red Army in the mid-1920s. The ballet follows the kidnap of two young women by the Basmachis and the steadfast resolve of the Red Army to rescue them. Drawing liberally from Lensky's extensive folk-song collections, the ballet abounds with jerky 5/8 and 7/8 metres. The ballet's success owed much to the recruitment of the pioneering avant-garde choreographer Kasyan Goleizovsky, who according to Balasanyan's memoir, impressed the locals with his knowledge of Tajik folk dance.<sup>104</sup>

Confident in the growing repertoire, Tajikistan's Central Committee passed a resolution in June 1939 committing to a Tajik dekada, and Moscow's approval came shortly after. By December, the Tajik Department of Arts Affairs had despatched the brigades to scour the peripheral theatres and amateur performing organisations for

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<sup>102</sup> Letter of 17 October 1939. Balasanyan (ed.), *Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma*, 238–39

<sup>103</sup> See biographical sketch in Yelena Grosheva, 'Balet *Dil'bar* i yego avtor', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1957/7, 79–80.

<sup>104</sup> See Balasanyan (ed.), *Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma*, 44–54.

talent.<sup>105</sup> The department enlisted twenty such talent scouts, who collectively enlisted around 750 potential *dekadniki*.<sup>106</sup> The Committee on Arts Affairs sent a representative from Moscow to evaluate the musical situation in the republic, but his report of October 1939 was pessimistic. On viewing the production of *Vosé*, he found the music and libretto 'apt and requiring very little work', but the production itself was 'no more than 50% ready', hampered by poor vocal technique and acting skills. At that point, *Kova the Blacksmith* was but a half-finished libretto, and the theatre management itself admitted that Balasanyan's early work *Lola* required 'serious revision'.<sup>107</sup> While extolling the talents of Lensky and Balasanyan, the report suggested that the Tajiks needed 'at least one more major opera master, at least as a consultant'.<sup>108</sup> The republic was deemed in dire need of acting, singing, and ballet coaches to work with certain individuals. More drastically still, the report advised replacing the dekada's leadership with 'politically proven, knowledgeable, and skilled people', to include an overall artistic director. The report heavily implied that the appointee should come from Moscow. The document further stipulated that a headquarters should be established from which dekada preparations could be coordinated, where representatives from Tajikistan and Moscow could work together. Even if all these recommendations were met, the report cautioned that it would still take 'every effort' to prepare a dekada for the planned deadline of autumn 1940.<sup>109</sup> The Tajiks continued to insist to Moscow that the deadline would be met, and it was only in November that they admitted to Khrapchenko that they would be ready 'no earlier than March 1941'.<sup>110</sup>

Though Balasanyan's *Kova the Blacksmith* aspired to be the most mature Tajik dekada work, it raised major concerns amongst officials at rehearsals in Moscow.

Influential critics who attended a dress rehearsal eight days before the premiere found it

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<sup>105</sup> Alikul Imamov, 'Kak prokhodila podgotovka k dekadě', *Tadzhikistanskaya pravda*, 12 April 1941, 3. Imamov was the head of the Tajik Department for Arts Affairs, which still operated as a sub-body of Tadjikistan's branch of Narkomros.

<sup>106</sup> M. S. Gaviyeva, 'Rol' družbī narodov v stanovlenii teatral'nogo iskusstva v Tadzhikistane', *Fundamental'niye issledovaniya 2* (2015), 4348.

<sup>107</sup> RGALI 962/21/44, 179.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–81.

<sup>110</sup> RGALI 962/21/47, 136.



riddled with shortcomings. In the meeting that followed the performance, the musicologist Boris Vladimirsky found the work protracted and overly sentimental, while complaining that the choruses lacked 'purity'. He insisted that the finale required substantial rewrites and that the entire third act needed shortening, if not entirely eliminating.<sup>111</sup> Grinberg agreed that the work had basic flaws that 'spoil it very much': the dances were awkwardly clipped short and needed developing, whilst he found the finale lacking in 'revolutionary fervour'. Chiming with Vladimirsky, Grinberg found the music largely tedious, protesting that the main female aria in the third act was 'too long and monotonous'.<sup>112</sup> The poor acting skills also irked Grinberg, an issue that also arose at dekada plenaries for Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. He complained that they ran the gamut from ostentatious overacting to chorus members strolling aimlessly onto the stage in the finale 'not knowing what they are doing'.<sup>113</sup> David Rabinovich agreed that the third act was lacklustre, which he attributed to poor performance skills and a lack of variation in tempo. For example, he complained that the musical delivery of the part of Kova's son Farrukh was 'motionless, static, almost without feeling, as if he were only fulfilling his musical obligations'. He concluded that 'there is a lot of work to be done, and in the eight days before the premiere, it must be done'.<sup>114</sup>

Responding to the criticism, *Kova's* librettist Abulkasim Lakhuti washed his hands of any responsibility, claiming that the 'dramatic fabric of my authored version has been so severely altered by the director Comrade [Dmitry] Kamernitsky (without my knowledge and participation) that it would be difficult to judge my libretto based on this production'.<sup>115</sup> Although Balasanyan was present, he remained silent for most of the meeting, speaking only briefly to agree to a few of the suggested alterations and to declare that 'everyone needs to work together in the next eight days'. Probing for some practical traction through

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<sup>111</sup> Stenographic record of a meeting discussing *Kuznets Kova*, 4 April 1941, RGALI 962/21/44, 64–65. 'If it is possible to do this now, then it is necessary to shorten the 3rd act. It's too long, it's just boring. I think that it should be removed, and the composer ought to agree with this'.

<sup>112</sup> 'At this moment, it is drama that is needed; what we get is sentimentality and ponderousness'. *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

the gridlock, the KDI's deputy chairman Solodovnikov called for damage control, and even suggested overtly suppressing the work's flaws from public knowledge:

Comrades, we are evaluating a performance that is ready to be shown already, and we must proceed from this position. But we must foremost talk about those shortcomings that must be changed now [...], without these amendments the performance has a shade of provincial sloppiness [*ner'yashlivost'*], it cannot be released in this form. [...] We will not explain all this to the public. We know what the problem is, so we need to finish everything as soon as possible. It is difficult for the theatre to implement all this now, because it is working on other productions, so we need to help, [and] it may be necessary to introduce additional hours [of rehearsal].<sup>116</sup>

Solodovnikov's reference to 'provincial sloppiness' speaks to the latent prejudice of certain officials, whose harboured notions of the 'backward' Eastern republics continued to colour their perception of national works. There is no archival record of a discussion about Balasanyan's other opera *Vosé's Uprising*, but it seems that around the same time a decision was soon made to cut a performance of this work in favour of an additional performance of Lensky's ballet.<sup>117</sup> Notwithstanding that *Kova the Blacksmith* and *Vosé's Uprising* were the dekada's two headline operas, Stalin attended neither.<sup>118</sup>

Lensky's ballet *Two Roses* received a more positive assessment in KDI meetings. Though some flaws were found in the ballet's music and character development, the shortcomings were deemed to be slight and justifiable for an early Tajik ballet.<sup>119</sup> The reception of Balasanyan's *Vosé's Uprising* was also lukewarm. Yuriy Keldish identified 'serious flaws' in both the 'naive and schematic' music and 'stereotyped' libretto. Keldish made some allowances, recognizing the relative youth of the Tajik opera company. While the KDI's musicological committee had severely maligned the finale of *Kova the Blacksmith*, Balasanyan had apparently hit the mark with *Vosé's* finale, sidestepping the 'sluggishness and strained schematization' with which Keldish found many Soviet-opera finales afflicted. While Keldish admitted that Balasanyan had failed to be 'seduced by

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>117</sup> An archived draft schedule shows that *Vosé's Uprising* was initially destined for three performances, *Two Roses* for only one. In the final schedule one performance of *Vosé* was replaced with Lensky's ballet. While the draft itself is undated, it appears amongst a group of documents dated from late March 1941; the decision to cut a performance of *Vosé's Uprising* was therefore likely made in early April. See RGALI 962/21/44, 20, and for the final running order: *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 13 April 1941, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Stalin attended *Two Roses*, *Lola*, and a Tajik-language production of Shakespeare's *Othello*. See *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 20 April 1941; RGASPI 558/11/1479, 16–19.

<sup>119</sup> Stenographic record of a meeting discussing *Two Roses*, 11 April 1941. RGALI 962/21/44, 51–64.

luxurious and decorative “exoticism” he had also ‘limited himself to somewhat sparing harmonic means’ that resulted in ‘schematization and monotony’.<sup>120</sup>

Despite the negative reception in the press, Balasanyan weathered the criticism and left the dekada with a more prestigious award than Lensky.<sup>121</sup> After his return to Moscow in 1943 he composed another Tajik work from afar, the ballet *Leyli and Medzhnun* (1947), which soon earned him a second-class Stalin prize.<sup>122</sup> From 1948 he taught at the Moscow Conservatoire and headed its composition department for much of the 1960s. Lensky remained in Tajikistan until 1957, though his Western pretensions led to an increasingly fractured relationship with the musical establishment. His tireless campaign to introduce European influences and disinclination to learn the Tajik language eventually cost him his reputation.<sup>123</sup> In the report from the Tajik Composers’ Union’s Second Congress in 1956, authorities jumped on the excuse to slate Lensky’s new ballet *Dilbar*.<sup>124</sup>

As the dekada opened, a special colour edition of Tajikistan’s main Russian-language newspaper carried congratulatory words ‘to the artworkers of sunlit Tajikistan’. The congratulations came from venerated *dekadniki* of the last five years: from Litvinenko-Volhemut from Ukraine, Byul-Byul from Azerbaijan, and Khalima Nasirova from Uzbekistan. As ever, the figure of Stalin dominated, and the admiring words from national artists were accompanied by a portrait of the leader. There was also a poem extolling Stalin’s omnipotence in the life of Soviet Tajikistan, that he was ‘invisibly present in every Tajik family’ and that his ‘image lives indelibly in every heart’ (see Figure 5.3).<sup>125</sup> At the final concert, Lensky supplied the customary Stalin ode.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Keldish, ‘Pervaya tadjhiskaya opera’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 13 April 1941, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Balasanyan received the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, Lensky the Badge of Honour. *Pravda*, 24 April 1941, 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Leyli and Medzhnun* was performed at the second Tajik dekada in April 1957 and is still regularly performed in Tajikistan.

<sup>123</sup> See Artemy Kalinovsky, ‘Opera as the Highest Stage of Socialism’, *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter* 74 (2016), 35.

<sup>124</sup> ‘Navstruchu Vtoromu Vsesoyuznomu s”yezdu sovetskikh kompozitorov’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1956/4, 112.

<sup>125</sup> *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 12 April 1941, 1.

<sup>126</sup> For the Russian text, see RGALI 962/21/47, 52–53.

Figure 5.3. Special dekada issue of *Kommunist Tadjikistana*.

Коммунисты Таджикистон

# КОММУНИСТ ТАДЖИКИСТАНА

ОРГАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОГО КОМИТЕТА, СТАЛИНБАДСКОГО ОБЪЕМА И ГОРКОМА КП(б) ТАДЖИКИСТАНА  
И ВЕРХОВНОГО СОВЕТА ТАДЖИКИСКОЙ ССР

№ 86 (4385)      12 апреля 1941 года, суббота      № 86 (4385)

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Заслуженный деятель науки Таджикской ССР.

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Писатель.

Желаем творческих  
успехов

С творческим успехом работайте, дорогие таджикские работники искусства. Мы желаем вам творческих успехов, мы желаем вам творческих успехов.

**ВЛАДИМИР ГРИГОРИЙ.**  
Народный артист республики, артист.

Source: *Kommunist Tadjikistana* (12 April 1941, 1).

As discussed in Chapter 2, until now Stalin had acted as a kind of seen but unheard figurehead at the dekadas. At the Tajik dekada's final reception he broke his silence and delivered the main address, which had formally been the task of other Politburo members. This would be the penultimate of his peacetime public appearances, happening to coincide with Lenin's birthday. Stalin traced the formation of the 'friendship of the peoples' policy back to his predecessor, mapping the dekada project onto the first principles of Soviet nationality policy:

We are enjoying with you today the fruits of the friendship of the peoples, [...] we old Bolsheviks remember how we used to call old tsarist Russia the prison-house of the peoples. Now we have the Soviet Union, with its open fields in which free and equal people work. [...]

But who came up with this policy? – Lenin. It was he, Lenin, who opposed the old ideology, which held that one race will ascend to heaven while the other people are belittled and oppressed. This old ideology is dead, it has no future. It is defied by the new ideology, the ideology of the friendship of the peoples, which holds that all people are equal.

[...]

Sometimes our Russian comrades mix everyone up: a Tajik with an Uzbek, an Uzbek with a Turkmen, an Armenian with a Georgian. Of course, this is wrong. Tajiks are a special people with an ancient and great culture, and in our Soviet conditions they have a great future. And the entire Soviet Union must help them. I would like their art to be surrounded by everyone's attention.<sup>127</sup>

And so, the dekada was proof that the solution to the pesky old 'national question' was not only answered but fully implemented. However, tracing the roots of the 'friendship of the peoples' policy back to Lenin was something of a misrepresentation, having been unveiled in December 1935 more than a decade after Lenin's death. When Stalin unveiled the new slogan to a delegation of Tajik and Turkmen collective farm workers, he had signposted Lenin's conviction that 'there should be neither dominant nor subordinate nations [*narodov*], that nations should be equal and free', but stopped short of attributing the policy to Lenin directly.<sup>128</sup> The dispute went back to 1922, when Lenin and Stalin had quarrelled over the relationship between Russia and its former imperial territories. Stalin

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<sup>127</sup> RGASPI 558/11/1125, 13–15. Vladimir Nevezhin has curated substantial textual variations between different published and archival versions of the speech, which was subsequently subjected to various layers of censorship. I quote directly from the typescript in Stalin's personal archive, which seems the most likely representation of the words Stalin spoke. Nevezhin notes that the original version shows Stalin's fondness for colloquial language. For instance, once using the verb *skovirnut'sya* (to knock or fall off) as a metaphor for death, replaced with 'to die' in Stalin's collected works published in the 1950s. Nevezhin, *Zastol'niye rechi Stalina: Dokumenti i materialii* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2003), 254.

<sup>128</sup> 'Rech' tov. Stalina', *Pravda*, 6 December 1935, 3.

had favoured a more centralized model which he called 'autonomization', where the republics would be compelled to join the Russian federation, while Lenin had his way in forming a new umbrella federation, the USSR, in which each republic would have equal rights to self-determination.<sup>129</sup> Western scholars broadly argue that as Stalin gained power through the 1930s, the 'friendship of the peoples' campaign was a mechanism for replacing Lenin's policy with Russocentric imperialism by stealth.<sup>130</sup> Russian authorities have posited similar readings of Stalin's dekada speech. Anatoliy Latishev decries the speech as an exercise in 'disguised imperial demagoguery' evidencing the nature of Stalin's 'anti-people regime'.<sup>131</sup> Vladimir Nevezhin has uncovered an unpublished memoir of one attendee who claimed to overhear Stalin supporting the notion of pan-Slavism, rather undermining the thrust of the speech he had given hours earlier.<sup>132</sup> Even for the most devoted Stalinists, the apparent contradictions were too much to swallow. When the speech was published among Stalin's collected works in the 1950s, several editorial changes were made. For example, Nevezhin has noted that a statement declaring that the Tajiks were essentially an Iranian people was erased from the published version, most likely since it seemed to undermine Tajikistan's status as a free and independent nation.<sup>133</sup>

The rising tide of Russocentrism was evidencing itself in the attitudes of commentators in Moscow, who increasingly held dekada music to European standards in their expectations both of musical form and performance. The Soviet Union's nature as an anticolonial 'affirmative-action empire', as Terry Martin has dubbed it, was a contradiction at its core, and it spawned a web of micro-contradictions in the minutiae of cultural life. On the one hand, the dekadas were run by a centralised 'all-union' committee in Moscow, whose snobbish prejudices often got the better of them. Moreover, the subjects of dekada

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<sup>129</sup> See Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016 [2005]), Chapter 2: 'Autonomization versus Federation (1922-3)', 19–31.

<sup>130</sup> Ronald Suny, *Red Flag Wounded: Stalinism and the Fate of the Soviet Experiment* (London: Verso, 2020), 66–70; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 432–61.

<sup>131</sup> Anatoliy Latishev, 'I yeshchyo odin tost "vozhdyia narodov"', *Iskusstvo kino* 1991/5, 142

<sup>132</sup> Nevezhin, *Zastol'niye rechi Stalina*, 257. The memoir in question was censored from publication in 1949 since the recollections 'did not give a correct impression of the leader'.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

works were bound up in imperialist conquests against religion and traditional values that infringed against Soviet orthodoxies. On the other hand, years of anticolonial rhetoric had also taken hold on aspects of music making, and many musicians and composers had become genuinely (and to some extent uncritically) invested in the multinational vision that the 'friendship of the peoples' campaign promised.

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On 22 June, two months after the curtain fell on the Tajik dekada, Germany broke their peace settlement and mounted a devastating invasion across the Soviet western border. Sustaining cultural activities in the Soviet Union's vulnerable western cities became unthinkable almost immediately. A letter from the composer Tikhon Khrennikov to his wife just a month after the invasion gives some measure of how grim the situation in Moscow had already become:

I am so happy that you have left [Moscow]. Whatever hardships you endure there, all these are absolute trifles compared with what Moscow is going through right now. Daily bombing, destroyed buildings, human casualties. The German raids begin at 10 p.m. and end at 3 a.m. [...] They have introduced [rationing] cards for all products and manufactured goods. [...] People do not sleep enough, they are nervous. The incendiary bombs dropped by the Germans are not so bad and Muscovites have quickly learned how to extinguish them, so fires have done little harm to Moscow, but high-explosive bombs are a more serious thing, an encounter with them is brief. The Vakhtangov Theater is absolutely destroyed [...] We have been formed into fire brigades and are on duty in the attic of our house every other day during an alarm. We are subject to military discipline, and leaving one's post means a revolutionary tribunal. So far, thank God, not a single bomb has fallen on our house. We are on tenterhooks!"<sup>134</sup>

The theatres in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Minsk, Odesa, Perm, Ufa, and Orenberg were swiftly evacuated. All of Moscow's cultural institutions were displaced: the Bolshoi to Kuybyshev, the state orchestra to Frunze in Kyrgyzstan, the Moscow Conservatoire to Saratov, and the Moscow Composers' Union to Sverdlovsk.<sup>135</sup>

Inevitably, the varied menu of dekadas planned for the following year was immediately axed. Leah Goldman claims that there were no dekadas devoted either to the RSFSR (that is, Russia) or Turkmenistan, an exclusion she respectively attributes to Russia's imperial self-regard and to the fact that Turkmenistan was deemed 'too

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<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Andrey Kokarev, *Tikhon Khrennikov* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2015), 72. The letter dates from late July 1941.

<sup>135</sup> Abram Gozenpud, *Russkiy sovetskiy operniy teatr*, 426; Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917–1981*, enl. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1983 [1972]), 175.

underdeveloped to have much musical culture at all'.<sup>136</sup> These claims do not withstand close examination. Dekadas for both were either in development or had in fact even already happened when the war broke out. In May 1940 a dekada of Leningrad art was held in Moscow, which included more than double the number of performances and participants than the otherwise largest Belorussian dekada. Although it was held under the auspices of the national dekadas, it was never routinely included in general reference lists and received less public recognition.<sup>137</sup> In addition to Buryat-Mongolia, there were well-established plans within the next year to mount dekadas in Moscow for Bashkiria and Tatarstan, both autonomous republics within the RSFSR.<sup>138</sup> Plans for a Turkmen dekada were also well-advanced. The Turkmen press publicly unveiled its plans for a dekada in December 1940, and two months later Molotov granted six million roubles to fund preparations for a festival to take place in March 1942.<sup>139</sup>

Another area of interest was the recently acquired Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, annexed in June 1940 under the Soviet-Nazi pact. Soviet puppet governments were quickly established, and various institutions were nationalized, while hundreds of thousands of nationalist 'undesirables' were purged, including cultural figures.<sup>140</sup> Three months into the occupation, *Pravda* ran an interview with Solodovnikov, who confirmed that resolutions had already been passed to hold dekadas for all three Baltic republics the following year, such that they could show their 'first steps towards mastering socialist culture'. He lamented how the previous 'commercial goals' of the theatres had stunted creative progress, all of which were rapidly being brought under state control. The Baltic theatres required 'immediate concrete assistance', and Solodovnikov

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<sup>136</sup> Goldman, 'Nationally Informed: The Politics of National Minority Music during Late Stalinism', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 67/3 (2019), 376.

<sup>137</sup> See RGALI 962/21/1, 10.

<sup>138</sup> The former was to include the first Bashkir opera *Khakmar* about the struggle to build collective farms, the opera *Karlugas* (The Swallow) by Aleksandr Spendiaryan's nephew Nikolay Chemberdzhi, and the opera *The White Horse* by Antonio Spadavekkia. RGALI 962/21/65, 19; *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 9 March 1941. The Tatars were especially eager to display two operas by the young Moscow Conservatoire graduate Nazib Zhiganov: *Kachin* ('The Fugitive', 1939) and *Irek* ('Freedom', 1940). See RGALI 962/21/53, 19.

<sup>139</sup> *Turkmenskaya iskra*, 25 December 1940, 2; RGALI 962/21/54, 12. The dekada was to display the music drama *Zokhre i Takhir* by Adrian Shaposhnikov, a ballet titled *Gozel'*, and two musical dramas *Seidi* and *Klyatva devushki* (The Maiden's Vow) by Klimenty Korchmaryov.

<sup>140</sup> Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, 45; Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and After the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 177–83.



promised that the KDI would soon be sending Moscow specialists to help develop 'ideologically permeated' performances.<sup>141</sup> Concomitantly, *Sovetskaya muzika* ran a report on the Baltic nations expressing the hope that presenting 'our new friends' to 'full-blooded' Soviet art would help them shun 'the most ultra-modern curiosities [*kunstshtyuki*] of Western artistic "fashion"' that resembled 'withered flowers of stunted, lifeless decadence'.<sup>142</sup>

Plans for the Baltic dekadas progressed rapidly. Moscow's Central Committee soon approved an almost ten-million-rouble budget for the Latvian dekada. The planned repertoire included the operas *Fire and Night* (1921) by Jānis Mediņš, *Baņuta* (1920) by Alfrēds Kalniņš, *In the Fire* (1937) by Jānis Kalniņš, and an unconfirmed Soviet opera.<sup>143</sup> In the midst of preparations, regional musicians and musicologists were coerced into renouncing Western trends in Latvian music and pursuing a folk-influenced path.<sup>144</sup> In Lithuania, there was serious trouble behind the scenes to identify suitable works. In March 1941 a planning meeting was held at the State Theatre in Vilnius. The Moscow theatre director Vladimir Meskheteli offered weak reassurance that 'it would be pointless to think that in the space of five months everyone has become communists' and that all must be treated with 'sensitivity' as they 'restructure their worldview'. Not so sensitive was his critique of the contending Lithuanian works. He dismissed a new opera by Juozas Tallat-Kelpša as 'national in form but completely non-socialist in terms of its content'. Another candidate, the ballet *Courtship* (1931) by Balys Dvarionas, was dubbed 'a pure mockery of the people'. The least offending composer was Stasis Šimkus, who was nonetheless obliged to address 'unpleasant things that need to be corrected' in his work.<sup>145</sup>

As the dekadas continued to roll by, a broader crisis that had long bubbled beneath the surface was beginning to enter the public arena. While the dekadas served as impressive displays of national culture, concerns were brewing over how far they were

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<sup>141</sup> 'Dekadī ēstonskogo, latviyskogo i litovskogo iskusstva v Moskve', *Pravda*, 6 September 1940, 2.

<sup>142</sup> Boris Yagolim and Grigoriy Shneyerson, 'Muzika v pribaltiyskikh respublikakh', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1940/9, 71.

<sup>143</sup> GARF R-5446/25/3439, 72.

<sup>144</sup> See Kevin Karnes, 'The Song Collector, the Year of Terrors and the Catastrophe that Followed: A Life in Occupied Latvia', in Fanning and Levi (eds), *Music Under German Occupation*, 256–59.

<sup>145</sup> RGALI 962/21/43, 50.

actually stimulating cultural development at home. Khrapchenko had taken to *Pravda* in the aftermath of the Buryat-Mongolian dekada to express his doubts. The KDI chairman suggested that some republics saw their dekada as an end rather than a means, a short-term goal rather than an impetus to long term systematic growth. As cited in Chapter 1, at the first dekada in 1936 Khrapchenko's predecessor Kerzhentsev had asserted that a certain degree of 'pomp and ceremony' (*pīshnost'*) was necessary, even healthy. But for Khrapchenko, this very factor was making dekada organizers lose sight of long-term goals. Rather, he maintained:

it is necessary to avoid the gratuitous pageantry [*paradnost'*] and excessive hype, which sometimes occurs. It is necessary to eliminate the possibility of such phenomena when the leaders of Soviet and Party organizations seek to spend a dekada in Moscow with great pomp and ceremony [*pīshnost'yu*], hardly bothering about what will happen in the development of art after the dekada.<sup>146</sup>

As the war rumbled on dekadas went into hibernation, and such gripes were driven from everyone's mind. In the following chapter, I will examine how the dekada revival of the 1950s continued to wrestle with well-founded charges of inefficacy, which became greatly magnified under the conditions of destalinization.

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<sup>146</sup> Khrapchenko, 'Rastsvet natsional'nogo iskusstva', *Pravda*, 31 October 1940, 2.

## Chapter 6 – Fusion of Nations: Dekadas After Stalin

In the immediate aftermath of the war there was no immediate inclination for a dekada revival. Between 1945 and 1951, eight ‘weeks’ (*nedeli*) of national art were organized to showcase national art through concerts and literary evenings, though these were nothing like on the scale of the pre-war dekadas.<sup>1</sup> The notion of a dekada revival was first broached in May 1948, when Politburo member and renowned opera buff Kliment Voroshilov made a routine trip to Kyiv. Recalling the performances by Ivan Patorzhinsky and Maria Litvinenko-Volhemut at the first Ukrainian dekada of 1936, he asked for a private performance from them.<sup>2</sup> At the time, the Ukrainians had no contemporary opera in their repertoire, so an opera was hastily commissioned from Konstantin Dankevich, who had studied in Odesa with Vasily Zolotaryov in the late 1920s. The chosen subject was Bogdan Khmel'nitsky, the real-life military hero who had presided over the union of Ukraine and Muscovy in 1654. It was hoped that this topic would be interpreted as an expression of Ukrainian-Russian solidarity. But this was not to be, and *Bogdan Khmel'nitsky* fell foul of a major party denunciation at its dekada performance.<sup>3</sup> Although it is tempting to see this episode as a sign that ‘national’ status no longer held the ideological sway it once had, the denunciation of Dankevich’s opera was as much a party whim as the respective attacks of Shostakovich and Muradeli in 1936 and 1948. Plenty of aesthetically suspect works would be habitually heaped with praise in the years ahead.

A frequently repeated claim about the post-war dekadas is that they introduced literature in addition to music.<sup>4</sup> There had, however, already been a calculated effort to expand literary activities and non-musical performances since the Belorussian dekada in

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<sup>1</sup> RGANI 5/36/22, 1. Aside from a reference in this Central Committee report giving a summative history of the dekadas, I have found no press reports about these events.

<sup>2</sup> See Serhy Yekelchuk, ‘*Diktat* and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture: Staging Patriotic Historical Opera in Soviet Ukraine, 1936–1954’, *Slavic Review* 59/3 (2000), 609 (citing RGALI 962/11/558).

<sup>3</sup> For an exhaustive account, with detailed reference to sources in Russian and Ukrainian archives, see Yekelchuk, ‘*Diktat* and Dialogue’, 606–14.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917–1981*, enl. ed. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1983), 132.

1940.<sup>5</sup> While literature continued to be included in the post-war dekadas, it remained undernourished compared to the emphasis on music. In January 1956, the Writers' Union wrote to the Central Committee requesting more funding for dekada literary events, claiming that it was unfairly weighted towards other branches of the arts. They also proposed that dekadas should be limited to two per year (about pre-war levels), voicing exasperation that as many as four dekadas had been scheduled for the following year.<sup>6</sup> Not only did these requests fall on deaf ears, but the schedule was ultimately expanded even further, and Moscow would ultimately host five dekadas in 1957. Later in 1956, the Writer's Union again protested to the Central Committee, objecting that while most dekada 'displays of art' were funded by the republic in question, literary events were being covered by the USSR Literary Fund. On this occasion the Central Committee conceded, recommending that future literary events be covered by the host republic, since current practices flouted the fund's charter and were provoking 'undesirable conversations amongst writers'.<sup>7</sup>

The post-war dekadas, which launched with the Ukrainian festival of 1951 and continued up to 1960, led a somewhat paradoxical existence. On the one hand, the revival continued at a pace far greater than pre-war levels. After 1955, Moscow on average hosted four or five dekadas a year, as opposed to the approximately biannual pre-war custom. Nor was there any marked reduction in funding or press coverage: *Pravda* continued to devote whole-page spreads to the dekadas throughout their post-war lifespan. But in 1960, with no apparent public explanation, the dekadas were quietly withdrawn. This chapter does not promise a detailed chronicle of the dekadas of this period, which would demand far more space than is available here, though I supply a complete list of festivals and their productions in Appendix 1. Rather, I will seek to explain why dekadas, as a symbol of high Stalinism, failed to survive Khrushchev's Thaw.

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<sup>5</sup> That this was a conscious decision is confirmed by a 1941 letter from Khrapchenko to the Central Committee. GARF R-5446/25/134, 36

<sup>6</sup> RGANI 5/36/23, 9–11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–66.

## The Decline of Opera

When Stalin died on 5 March 1953, the dekadas' showpiece genre was itself at the cusp of a drawn-out crisis.<sup>8</sup> While authorities had long hoped to police and coerce opera into the foremost genre of Soviet music, their actions had brought about quite the opposite. The fact that virtually every major political scandal in the music world since 1936 had been precipitated by the denunciation of an opera had hardly made composers amenable to the genre. An internal Central Committee report circulated two months after Stalin's death on the 'state of Soviet opera' spelled out the extent of the problem.<sup>9</sup> First, top Soviet composers were hardly positioning themselves as role models. Ivan Dzerzhinsky, the composer of Stalin's model opera *The Quiet Don*, had faced a catastrophic downward spiral in his career, and now his ability to write opera was deemed compromised by his troubled domestic life ('passion for alcohol' and the 'negative influence of his wife').<sup>10</sup> Even Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* had shown potential ('despite its serious flaws and formalist character'), but its composer's perceived refusal to return to the genre was supposedly driven by ideological vacillation and adherence to 'groupism' in the Composers' Union.<sup>11</sup> Khachaturian, who never had nor would compose an opera, was deemed guilty of harbouring 'undeserved' resentment towards the leadership of the Composers' Union and KDI for criticizing him in 1948. The report expressed the hope that if only the composer could overcome his 'wounded pride' and 'internal crisis' he 'might become useful for the development of Soviet opera'.<sup>12</sup>

But the circumspection of top composers was apparently the tip of the iceberg.

Young composers were not being encouraged to write operas in the conservatories, since

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<sup>8</sup> Yekaterina Vlasova, for instance, considers the opera crisis (already apparent by the mid-1940s) a contributing factor to the crisis of 1948. See Vlasova, *1948 god v sovetskoy muzike* (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2010), 216–20.

<sup>9</sup> Vitaliy Afiani (ed.), *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1953–1957: Dokumenti* (Moscow: Rosspén, 2001), 66–79 (reproducing RGANI 5/17/445, 17–33). The report has three credited authors, though the only one with musical credentials was Boris Yarustovsky, who likely supplied the majority of the report's observations. Since 1948, Yarustovsky had emerged as a senior party mouthpiece on musical affairs, so much so that gossipers in the Composer's Union had apparently dubbed him 'the best chekist [secret service agent] amongst musicologists, and the best musicologist amongst the chekists'. See Kshishtof [Krzysztof] Meyer, *Shostakovich: Zhizn', tvorchestvo, vremya* (Saint Petersburg: DSCH, 1998), 287.

<sup>10</sup> Afiani, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1953–1957*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 69–70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

only three of the dozens of such institutions across the Soviet Union curated dedicated courses in operatic composition. The report claimed that in the previous five years, the only Russian composer to defend an opera as a graduation piece was Boris Chaykovsky, who composed only one act and immediately abandoned the work after graduating.<sup>13</sup> Other student operas were all by non-Russians whose works 'only had local significance for individual republics' or (more condescendingly still) could 'hardly count on being distributed owing to their limited national subject matter'.<sup>14</sup> Prejudice against opera librettos in the Writers' Union was an additional stumbling block, since top writers routinely refused to have their plots adapted into operas. The various institutions tasked with overseeing new operas – the Drama Commission of the Writers' Union, the Opera Commission of the Composers' Union, the Ministry of Culture, and the Department of Music Theatres – were all deemed to be hampered by varying degrees of idleness and incompetence. The Composers' Union, for instance, had appointed a string of short-lived heads of the Opera Commission, most recently the musicologist Aleksandr Shaverdyan, who had gladly accepted the generous 2000-rouble-a-month salary and then apparently done little work in the position.<sup>15</sup>

Another disincentive for composers was the problem of remuneration. Most composers preferred to write film music, which entailed considerably less work than an opera for much greater material gain. Between 1948–1952, Shostakovich wrote music for eight films and earned a staggering 600,000 roubles, while Khachaturian earned half a million in the same period for seven films. Tikhon Khrennikov had amassed 300,000 roubles for six films, having apparently dashed off a mere handful of popular songs for each project. By comparison, composers routinely received 60,000 roubles for an opera, which did not come with the generous repeat royalty payments of film music. In addition to the high volume of work involved in an opera, the task also guaranteed an exhausting audition process, which if successful at all would inevitably demand substantial and time-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 70. Chaykovsky's student opera was based on Kazakevich's wartime novel *Zvezda* (Star), concerning the experiences of Soviet reconnaissance troops trapped behind enemy lines. Chaykovsky never attempted another opera.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 73.

consuming revisions. Additionally, according to the report, the high risk of public critical failure in turn jeopardized ‘the ideological and creative integrity of the composer’.<sup>16</sup> And critical failure was virtually guaranteed: the history of opera denunciations since the *Lady Macbeth* debacle of 1936 had given the press a knee-jerk reaction of negative judgement, fostering a ‘demoralizing mood’ amongst composers.<sup>17</sup>

Another 1953 report revealed serious shortcomings in the Composers’ Unions in the republics, which had been rapidly established in the 1930s with more focus on quantity than quality. Republican branches often had paltry membership figures comprising few native composers. For instance, the Moldavian branch had eighteen members, three of whom were Moldavian. The Tajik Union was similarly afflicted, counting only four Tajiks amongst its thirteen members. The Karelo-Finnish branch, whose republic would be granted a *dekada* in 1959, had only five members (two Finns and no Karelians!).<sup>18</sup> As the 1950s wore on, articles began to appear in *Sovetskaya muzika* confirming that the systemic problems affecting opera in Russia were equally rampant in the periphery. In 1955 an article by the composer Aleksandr Shaverzashvili enumerated issues that were obstructing opera in Georgia. Like their Russian counterparts, Georgian playwrights were unwilling to write librettos, since plays were more prestigious and lucrative. There was also an apparent (and perhaps well-founded) consensus in the Georgian Writer’s Union that if an opera was a success all the credit went to the composer, while librettists invariably took the blame for critical failures.<sup>19</sup> For Georgian composers, bureaucracy in the Ministry of Culture and Composers’ Union (‘petty adjustments made to the text and music at the whim of various “specialists”’) was causing composers to abandon operas.<sup>20</sup> Something of a scandal emerged the following year with

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 82 (reproducing RGANI 5/17/444, 46–50).

<sup>19</sup> A. Shaverzashvili, ‘Chto meshayet sozdaniyu gruzinskoy operi’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1955/10, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. An article later appeared criticizing Shaverzashvili’s insistence that institutions had to be more trusting and communicative with composers, instead arguing that the poor initiative of Georgian that was at fault. M. Meskhi, ‘Chto zhe meshayet razvitiyu gruzinskoy operi?’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1956/5, 65–67.

a new Soviet Georgian opera by Archil Kereselidze, announced with much fanfare by the Paliashvili Opera House in Tbilisi, which turned out to be a reworking of an older work.<sup>21</sup>

Strained relations between composers and institutions were becoming commonplace. The composer Nazib Zhiganov, head of the Kazan Conservatory and Tatar Composers' Union, supplied two operas for the 1957 Tatar dekada, throughout whose preparations he waged a constant war against the opera house. He complained that 'the opera house is built on the principle of socializing rather than that of artistry', accusing the management of refusing to admit better soloists for fear that there would no longer be parts for the established vocalists at the dekada.<sup>22</sup> Others voiced frustration over the relentless intrusion of authorities in creative matters; at one dekada planning meeting the Tatar writer Amirkhan Yeniki was adamant that 'our work is creative, it cannot be administered'.<sup>23</sup>

The situation was apparently no better in Central Asia, where there was growing resentment towards Western influence. Kiril Tomoff has shown that after 1948 the Uzbeks adopted the Soviet buzzword 'anticosmopolitanism' (which usually carried antisemitic undertones) as a legitimizing policy to pursue a 'separate path' of anti-Westernism in music. Somewhat nuancing Tomoff's argument, Frolova-Walker suggests that this episode was a part of multi-layered fluctuations between Westernizing and separatist tendencies.<sup>24</sup> The composer and director of the Tashkent Conservatoire Mukhtar Ashrafi, who came down firmly on the side of the Westernizers,<sup>25</sup> took to the press to attack the state of Uzbek opera. He complained that no new Uzbek operas had been composed in recent years, and recent attempts only constituted insipid rehashings of old operas and dramatic plays. Ashrafi took issue with the Navoi Opera House in Tashkent, which had

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<sup>21</sup> A. Tsulukidze, 'Gruzinskaya muzika za vosem' let', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1956/5, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Ye. V. Bureyeva, 'Dekada tatarskoy literatur'i i iskusstva v Moskve 24 maya – 4 iyunia 1957 goda: Podgotovka, itogi i nacheniye', *Vestnik Chelyabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 2011/1, 98.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Tomoff, 'Uzbek Music's Separate Path: Interpreting "Anticosmopolitanism" in Stalinist Central Asia, 1949–52', *The Russian Review* 63/2 (2004), 212–40; Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 166–69.

<sup>25</sup> Ashrafi had been caught up in his fair share of scandals about malpractice and plagiarism. See Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, 167.



proven to be all talk and no action when it came to forging creative ties with composers and writers.<sup>26</sup>

Ashrafi next turned to what was becoming a serious concern for many commentators, the practice of 'co-authorship': where national composers worked in collaboration with visiting Russian 'specialists'. Rather than empowering local composers to master opera, the method seemed rather to be producing dismal failures. He cited the recent fiasco of the opera *Takhir and Zukhra*, composed by the folk musician Tohtasin Jalilov and Leningrader Boris Brovtsin, to apparently dire reviews.<sup>27</sup> In the face of this failure, Lev Stepanov (a Moscow-trained student of Myaskovsky, and author of several unacclaimed operas) was brought in to 'finalize' the opera, but even his revised orchestration had received public condemnation according to Ashrafi. But what most irked Ashrafi was that Jalilov, who had had no Western musical training, was the main credited composer of the work, and was being praised for 'things he had not and could not have done'.<sup>28</sup>

Another pertinent case was the opera *Pulat and Gulru*, credited to Sharofiddin Saifiddinov and unveiled at the 1957 Tajik dekada in Moscow. Sergei Balasanyan – the celebrated composer of the pre-war Tajik dekada (see Chapter 4), now resettled in Moscow – made an example of the scandal surrounding this opera in a remarkable 1960 article for *Sovetskaya muzika*. Deemed too frank for publication, it was only published in 2002.<sup>29</sup> It is likely no coincidence that this article was written in the same year that the dekadas were finally axed, for it laid a large part of the blame for the crisis in national opera with the dekada project itself. Balasanyan admitted that while Russian composers like himself had sought to 'prepare the ground' for national opera, most of the pre-war experiments had been failures. These operas, including his own, he claimed were blighted by too strong a 'Russian accent'. They were not true national works but 'Russian operas

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<sup>26</sup> Ashrafi, 'Nashi trudnosti preodolimi', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1956/3, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 48. Apparently Moscow officials were more charitable towards the opera, but still held the consensus that *Takhir* was musically weak. See Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, 168–69.

<sup>28</sup> Ashrafi, 'Nashi trudnosti preodolimi', 48.

<sup>29</sup> Karina Balasanyan (ed.), *S. A. Balasanyan: Stat'i, vospominaniya, pis'ma* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2003), 36; Balasanyan, 'Chto meshayet razvitiyu operi v Sredney Azii', *Muzikal'naya akademiya* 2002/1, 92–94.

based on Central Asian subjects, written according to long-standing “tested” opera schemes of the nineteenth century’.<sup>30</sup> Balasanyan was now prepared to admit that the dekadas were part of the problem:

Dekadas have had all the drawbacks of an ostentatious event. For the most part they have demonstrated not those works that have stood the test of time, that have gained a foothold in the repertoire and become loved by listeners. They were rather specially written with the participation of numerous ‘consultants’ or ‘co-authors’ and staged with deliberate pomp and novelty. Of course, the triviality of the creative task (‘to throw dust in Moscow’s eyes’), the haste, the participation of several composers in the composition of one opera – all this had a negative impact on their quality. Usually, soon after the dekadas, these trinkets were removed from the repertoire and were forgotten.

This ‘campaigning spirit’ [*kampaneyschchina*] led to the creation of an unhealthy practice, whereby a professionally weak, often very young author undeservedly reaped ‘dekada laurels’ in the form of honorary titles, awards, gifts and so on.<sup>31</sup>

Balasanyan then turned to Saiffidinov, who had entered the Moscow Conservatoire at the age of eighteen in 1947. He had entered a newly formed ‘national department’ headed by Vladimir Feré, conceived to prepare musicians from the republics to study composition at conservatoire level. By the time he was asked to compose an opera for the 1957 Tajik dekada, he was only in his fourth year of postgraduate study.<sup>32</sup> This was to be the first fully-fledged opera by a Tajik composer. It soon emerged, however, that the opera had not been orchestrated by Saiffidinov, but rather by a trio of other talented postgraduates (Edison Denisov, Aleksey Nikolayev, and Aleksandr Pirumov). Saiffidinov was also rumoured to have accepted heavy-handed help from Feré.<sup>33</sup>

The general assessment of *Pulat and Gulru* was that it rather too emphatically copied features of Balasanyan’s operas of the pre-war Tajik dekada, and that it was hampered by a cack-handed treatment of leitmotifs and failure to achieve ‘symphonized dramaturgy’.<sup>34</sup> Balasanyan took issue with the fact that despite the heavy-handed help, Saiffidinov was the sole credited author of the work. He had been bestowed with various honours at the dekada and had even been presented with a house by Tajik authorities for the success of *Pulat and Gulru*. For Balasanyan, this was evidence that rather than

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<sup>30</sup> Balasanyan, ‘Chto meshayet razvitiyu operi v Sredney Azii’, 92.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Fere, ‘Muzika v Tadjikistane’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1957/5, 85.

<sup>33</sup> Viktor Vinogradov, ‘Molodoye rastsvetayushcheye iskustvo’, *Sovetskaya muzika* 1957/6, 67

<sup>34</sup> Zoya Tadjikova, ‘Tadjikskaya SSR’, in Yuriy Keldish (ed.), *Istoriya muziki narodov SSSR* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1970–1974), V/ii: 226.

empowering national composers towards self-sufficiency, the practice of co-authorship had in fact resulted in a culture of mollycoddling that was ‘accustoming [composers] to dependency and giving them an undeservedly easy and luxurious life’.<sup>35</sup>

The opera crisis in the republics, then, was no less systemic than in Moscow, ‘separate path’ or otherwise. Nevertheless, separatist ambitions were an ever-present threat to Moscow that would be increasingly curbed by Khrushchev’s policies by the end of the 1950s, as I shall discuss below. More generally, the decline of opera in the republics lay in the genre’s waning cultural relevance. By 1960 the Ministry of Culture was continuing to promote operas as a tool for propaganda, and statistics showed that more than half of operas performed in the USSR were by Soviet composers. However, this statistic masked the fact that most operas were of poor quality and were withdrawn within a season, while the paying public showed more interest in the classics than in contemporary opera.<sup>36</sup> While in the 1930s the newly established republican opera houses had been clamouring to establish a national canon, national repertoire was now firmly bedded in. Opera houses were evidently less willing to consider new productions when they could rely on re-running or at best ‘reworking’ established repertoire. Otherwise, inoffensive productions of Tchaikovsky, Asafiev, or Rimsky-Korsakov remained safer and cheaper crowd-pleasers. But since opera had hitherto formed the centrepiece of the *dekada* project, its increasingly precarious status was an ill omen.

### **Destalinization and the Rise of Internationalism**

On Stalin’s death in 1953, there was no immediate inclination from above to abandon Stalinist orthodoxies. That would not become real party policy until Khrushchev’s landmark ‘secret speech’ at the Twentieth Party Congress three years later. Stalin’s name, however, was abruptly excised from public life; *Pravda* completely expunged his name from its pages and ceased quoting him in editorials, while the forthcoming

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<sup>35</sup> Balasanyan, ‘Chto meshayet razvitiyu operi v Sredney Azii’, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah Schneider, ‘Opera After Stalin: Rodion Shchedrin and the Search for the Voice of a New Era’, unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Oxford, 2021), 61–62.

fourteenth and fifteenth volumes of his collected works were quietly cancelled.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, Soviet writers, artists, and composers were actively prohibited from creating works commemorating Stalin's memory.<sup>38</sup> Even as mourning and concerned citizens began writing in to express their anger over the inattention to Stalin, certain high-profile figures in the arts took the opportunity to call for a break from the past. One example was the writer Ilya Ehrenburg, whose 1953 article 'The Work of the Writer' criticized a culture that had systemically produced novels with poorly developed plots and characters.<sup>39</sup> Ehrenburg's 1954 novel *The Thaw (Ottepel')* would come to embody the spirit of the times, a period of gradual liberalization that would run to the mid-1960s. This period also saw a growing community of composers who embraced 'unofficial' music – such as Shnitke, Gubaidulina, and Pärt – who eschewed the politically correct 'national' musical language in favour of Western experimental techniques.<sup>40</sup>

The most seismic parallel to Ehrenburg's outcry in the music world came from Aram Khachaturian, notably his November 1953 article 'On Creative Boldness and Inspiration', which was more forthright even than Ehrenburg had dared to be.<sup>41</sup> Khachaturian's article was touted in the West as a turning point in Soviet music, even provoking a spat between West- and East-German music journals, the former claiming that it hailed a liberalizing agenda, the latter attacking its rival's 'gross exaggerations and slanderous comments'.<sup>42</sup> Even when Khachaturian's collected writings were published in 1980, the assigned Soviet editor saw fit to censor some of the composer's more cutting remarks from the original.<sup>43</sup> Like Ehrenburg, the composer began by calling out what he perceived as superficiality in Soviet music. This amounted to a 'persistent theory that what

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<sup>37</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 227.

<sup>38</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, 258–61.

<sup>39</sup> For an abridged translation, see R. S., 'Three Soviet Artists on the Present Needs of Soviet Art', *Soviet Studies* 5/4 (1954), 415–26 (originally published in *Noviy mir* 1953/10).

<sup>40</sup> See Peter Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> I quote from the translation in R. S., 'Three Soviet Artists', 427–32 (the original: 'O tvorcheskoy smelosti i vdokhnovenii', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1953/11, 7–13).

<sup>42</sup> Grigoriy Shneyerson, 'Po stranitsam zhurnala *Muzika i obshchestvo*', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1954/9.

<sup>43</sup> Innokentiy Popov (ed.), *Aram Khachaturyan: Stat'i i vospominaniya* (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1980), 33–42.

makes sense in art is not the “what” but the “how””; more specifically that ‘technique and form’ were being venerated by certain composers at the expense of ‘the *idea* of the work’ or its ‘*emotional content*’.<sup>44</sup> More seriously, Khachaturian claimed that a lack of ‘lively and inquiring thought’ amongst composers was stifling creative progress. He attacked the bureaucratic ‘institutional guardianship’ of musical life, calling for the abandonment of this ‘rotten practice of interfering with the composer’s creative work’.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Khachaturian turned on what he saw as the oversimplified conception of the ‘national principle’, which was being reduced to ‘the mere intonational structure of the melody’. The straitjacketing of national music to the cult of the folksong was leading to ‘national narrow-mindedness’ and even ‘dangerous national deviations’ that were forming ‘artistic barriers between the musical cultures of the fraternal socialist nations’.<sup>46</sup>

Arguing for a more nuanced understanding of ‘national form’ became an increasingly established musicological trope. Thus, the indefatigable specialist of national music Viktor Vinogradov wrote in 1954:

A limited understanding of national form as the mechanical sum of elements and norms of folk music leads to serious errors in creativity and theory. It is precisely from this narrow idea of national form in music that the desire arises to establish some kind of single monopolistic method of using folklore. Such a scholastic approach to musical creativity hinders its development.<sup>47</sup>

However, while those in high places felt increasingly emboldened to criticize the Stalinist conception of nationality in music, those lower down the hierarchy encountered more resistance. One such case was the musicologist Nelli Shakhnazarova. Her doctoral thesis ‘O natsional’nikh osobennostyakh iskusstva: Na primere muziki’ (‘The National Features of Art: On the Case of Music’) was completed in 1953, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between ‘socialist content’ and ‘national form’. More radically, she even suggested that art held a more productive role in the formation of national identity, rather than the symptomatic one that Stalin had inferred. Owing to various bureaucratic delays, she was not able to defend her thesis until 1955. According

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<sup>44</sup> R. S., ‘Three Soviet Artists’, 428 (Khachaturian’s emphasis).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>47</sup> Vinogradov, ‘Tvorchestvo kompozitorov respublik Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana’, in Vera Vasina-Grossman (ed.), *Sovetskaya muzika: Teoreticheskiye i kriticheskiye stat’i* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1954), 458.

to her memoir, the dissertation committee approved her thesis with a hesitancy bordering on reluctance, after deciding that her research was building upon Stalin's ideas rather than constituting an outright rebuttal. Her work remained unpublished until the early 1960s, but even then she found herself branded a 'heretic' and was accused of expounding racism by certain influential voices.<sup>48</sup>

On 25 February 1956 came Khrushchev's seismic 'secret speech', decrying Stalin's 'cult of personality' and placing the blame for the purges of the late 1930s squarely with the former leader. This was also the point at which Khrushchev cemented himself as leader, transcending the 'collective leadership' of the presidium (the new name for the Politburo), which had technically ruled since Stalin's death. The now explicit policy of destalinization issued in a wave of 'rehabilitations' of previously disgraced individuals, as well as some formerly spurned musical works. In 1958 the turn came for Dankevich's *Bogdan Khmel'nitsky*, the work that had been officially rebuked at the 1951 Ukrainian dekada. A party decree attributed the denunciation of the opera to Stalin's 'subjective approach', claiming that he had orchestrated a 'one-sided and tendentious criticism' of the opera and had falsely accused Dankevich of being 'unprincipled'.<sup>49</sup> In spite of such rapid reversals of Stalinist policies, destalinization seemed publicly to have no direct effect on the dekadas, which continued at pace. However, behind the scenes reformers were beginning to set the dekadas in their sights. With the ink barely dry on Khrushchev's 'secret speech', a June 1956 Central Committee report 'On Serious Shortcomings in the Repertoire of the Drama Theatres' ruled that the dekadas were no longer fit for purpose:

The question of holding dekadas of art of the peoples of the USSR is now acquiring special significance. [...] It must be admitted that the dekadas of literature and art held in Moscow have begun in many ways to take on a ceremonial character. In fact, after a dekada, instead of an upsurge in art and literature, in some republics there has been a decline in creative activity; hastily assembled collectives dissolve, and the attention paid by party and Soviet organizations to artistic institutions falters.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See her memoir of the affair in Shakhnazarova, *Izbranniye stat'i: Vospominaniya* (Moscow: State Institute for Arts Studies, 2013), 25–42.

<sup>49</sup> 'Ob isparvlenii oshibok v otsenke oper *Velikaya druzhbdya, Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy, i Ot vsego serdsa*' (party decree, 28 May 1958), *Pravda*, 8 June 1958, 3; also in *Izvestiya*, 10 June 1958, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Ashrafi, *Apparat TsK, 1953–1957*, 508 (reproducing RGANI 5/36/20, 103–09).

The report concluded that it expected the Ministry of Culture to prepare 'proposals on changing the procedure for holding dekadasy'.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile in the presidium, there were tensions brewing between the old Stalinist loyalists and Khrushchev's reformism. The war against the former came to a head in 1957 when Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich, and their last-minute ally Dmitry Shepilov (an old stooge of Zhdanov's, who had risen through Agitprop) were accused of plotting a coup against Khrushchev.<sup>52</sup> Just two months before the 'plot', Shepilov had delivered the headline speech at the second All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers, at which he remarked on the importance of the 'national foundation' of Soviet music: 'the creative use of Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbek, Georgian, Armenian, Latvian, Moldavian and other folksongs, this inexhaustible source of our musical classics, is regarded by some as old-fashioned. What a profound delusion!'<sup>53</sup> But Khrushchev survived the coup, and would hold on to power for a further seven years. He had fun at the expense of the four ringleaders selecting their humiliating demotions: Shepilov was exiled to Central Asia while Molotov became ambassador to Mongolia. Malenkov and Kaganovich were respectively crowned directors of a hydroelectric plant in Kazakhstan and a cement works in Sverdlovsk. In recent years, these four had proven to be far more devoted attendees of dekada performances than Khrushchev, and their loss was another chink in the armour of the Stalinist cultural legacy.

The way Khrushchev was personally portrayed through the dekadasy suggests a further break from Stalinist conventions. While Stalin hardly ever missed a dekada production, press reports of government attendance suggest that Khrushchev neglected as many as he attended. In earlier times, lists of government officials attending performances were constructed in a strict hierarchy of importance leading with Stalin; now they became alphabetized, with Khrushchev modestly bringing up the rear. The vast

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>52</sup> Whether the ringleaders actually had the intention of unseating Khrushchev is debatable. See Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 250–54; for Shepilov's recollections, see Shepilov, *The Kremlin's Scholar: A Memoir of Soviet Politics Under Stalin and Khrushchev*, Stephen Bittner (ed.), Anthony Autsin (trans.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 387–400.

<sup>53</sup> 'Tvorit' dlya blaga i schast'ya naroda: Rech' Sekretera TsK KPSS tov. D. T. Shepilova na Vtorom Vsesoyuznom s'yezde sovetkikh kompozitorov', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1957/5, 17, also in *Pravda*, 4 April 1957, 4–5; and the same day in *Izvestiya*, 2–4.

effigies of Stalin that adorned the stage of final concerts were quickly withdrawn, though Lenin's invariably remained. While Khrushchev did not always discourage displays of sycophancy towards himself, neither did he show much inclination to present himself as a pseudo-divine 'father of the peoples'. In fact, he seems to have gone out of his way to subvert the Stalinist image. For example, when Khrushchev and government officials were photographed being presented with flowers at the final concert of the 1960 Ukrainian dekada, they sat not in the government (formerly tsarist) box as Stalin had done, but rather amongst the general public in the auditorium (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1.** Khrushchev with government officials at the final concert of the 1960 Ukrainian dekada.



Source: *Pravda* (24 November 1960, 1).

Another symptom of destalinization was the fact that national cultural exchange was gaining a more global significance than it ever had under Stalin. By the late 1950s, the 'cultured' Soviet person was increasingly encouraged to dabble with Western culture, albeit selectively and with due criticism for the extremes of bourgeois decadence.<sup>54</sup> Festivals became the primary means for enacting the new international outlook in the cultural sphere. The most significant step came with the World Festival of Youth held in Moscow in 1957. As young people from around the world descended on Moscow, the festival marked a watershed in Khrushchev's cultural policy, overturning Stalinist cultural

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<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 166–70.



isolationism and embracing a new 'world culture'. Sheila Fitzpatrick has noted that the language of memoirists from the festival resembled the ecstasy of the heady days of the 1917 Revolution.<sup>55</sup>

This spirit of internationalism soon entered the cultural sphere. At the Twentieth Party Congress, simultaneously with the delivery of his seismic 'secret speech', Khrushchev declared that 'art and literature of our country can and must become the best in the world'.<sup>56</sup> Such a goal could only be achieved if Soviet musicians could demonstrate their talents internationally. This was most conspicuously achieved in the founding of international competitions such as the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in 1958. Kiril Tomoff has shown that the competition grew out of plans posed in 1951 to hold a 'Moscow Music Holiday', an international musical project that never came to fruition. In its proposal for the event, the KDI suggested the massive new festival would establish Moscow as the 'global centre of musical culture' as well as strengthen 'the influence of Soviet arts on the development of progressive musical creativity abroad'.<sup>57</sup> Plans for the Music Holiday closely resembled the dekada model: the Bolshoi would host six operas or ballets, various orchestral concerts, folk choir performances, and dance troupes. These would be the result of collaborative efforts between Russian and visiting musicians from around the world. The plans also suggested founding an international violin and piano competition to be named after Tchaikovsky, the only aspect of the plans that ever came to fruition.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the KDI were expressing similar hopes for the early post-war dekadas. Then chairman Polikarp Lebedev remarked in a planning meeting for the 1951 Ukrainian dekada that he hoped the impact of the dekada would 'reach such a scale that its significance will reach beyond the borders of our country and will be known about abroad'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Fitzpatrick, 'Afterword: The Thaw in Retrospect', in Kozlov and Gilburd (eds), *The Thaw*, 484.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in 'Put' sovet'skoy muziki – put' narodnosti i realizma', *Pravda*, 8 June 1958, 3–4

<sup>57</sup> Kiril Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad: Soviet Music and Imperial Competition During the Early Cold War, 1945–1958* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 84.

<sup>58</sup> Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad*, 85–86.

<sup>59</sup> RGALI 962/3/2306, 2.

Of course, the new internationalist cultural vision was a symptom of the Cold War, which was being increasingly fought in the cultural sphere. Tomoff cites the victory of pianist Van Cliburn at the first International Tchaikovsky Competition, which gave a boost to America's wounded national pride after the embarrassment of Sputnik and similar Soviet achievements. Meanwhile, the Soviets accepted Cliburn's victory as a success of the competition's even-handed objectivity, confident that cultural dialogue with the West would ultimately cement the Soviet Union's dominance in the cultural sphere. This became affirmed as Soviet artists resumed their pre-war domination of international competitions.<sup>60</sup> Such events demonstrated the evolving globalizing ambitions of national exchange, which in Stalinist times had been a phenomenon to be celebrated only within Soviet territory. By the late 1950s, the *dekadas* had become an arena to broadcast this new internationalist rhetoric. At the 1959 Buryat *dekada*, *Pravda's* lead editorial seemed most concerned with contextualizing the *dekada* successes within the achievements of Soviet culture abroad, a marked departure from the insular 'multinational' discourse of Stalin's times.<sup>61</sup> That 'multinationalism' was as at least on a par with internationalism was further emphasized by Voroshilov's toast at the reception of the 1960 Ukrainian *dekada*: 'for our country's unity and brotherly union, for peace and friendship of the peoples of the whole world'.<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 6.2.** Khrushchev at the final reception of the 1960 Ukrainian *dekada*



Source: *Pravda* (26 November 1960, 1).

<sup>60</sup> Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad*, 1–2 and 99.

<sup>61</sup> 'Sovetskaya mnogonatsional'naya kul'tura', *Pravda*, 8 December 1959, 1.

<sup>62</sup> 'Radostniy prazdnik ukrainskoy kul'turi', *Pravda*, 26 November 1960, 1.

## Fusion of Nations

On 17 July 1960 various members of the Soviet arts world were invited to a reception at Stalin's old dacha in Semyonovskoye, about 100 kilometres south of Moscow.

Khrushchev had taken to arranging such informal gatherings to curry favour with the intelligentsia, though not always successfully. At a similar event in May 1957, an allegedly inebriated Khrushchev had irked other members of the presidium by tactlessly gossiping about his personal disagreements with Molotov, while a heavy thunderstorm threatened to bring down the tent. He also insulted and lashed out at various writers, including the aging Marietta Shaginyan, apparently merely after she had inquired about a shortage of butter in Armenia.<sup>63</sup> Khrushchev, apparently now on better behaviour, was also present at the 1960 event, along with top composers such as Shostakovich, Khachaturian, and Khrennikoiv. Most intriguingly, the party ideologist Mikhail Suslov, who gave the main address, suggested that a certain critical attitude to 'national form' was now emerging as a mainstream party position:

It would be wrong to consider national tradition as only that which distinguishes one national culture from another, or only in connection with a people's heritage, with its history, and with that which reflects the onerous life of the people under social and national oppression. It is necessary to be alert to supporting new traditions, the shared features that are emerging in the relations of Soviet socialist nations under communist construction.<sup>64</sup>

Boris Schwarz read this event as a 'reversal' of the 'national in form, socialist in content' policy, pointing out that various top composers took to the Composers' Union bulletin to support a 'de-emphasis of the folkish'.<sup>65</sup>

Aside from a more open relationship with the outside world, by the late 1950s Khrushchev was pursuing a nationalities policy that sought a clear break from Stalinism. On the one hand, he began to pursue a decentralized model of governance, which allowed for as much a greater degree of national expression as it did corruption. On the

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<sup>63</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 249; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: The Free Press, 2003), 309–10; Vladimir Tendryakov, 'Na blazhennom ostrove kommunizma', *Noviy mir* 1988/9, 27–29. Tendryakov (who was not present at the 1957 gathering) claimed to have heard that Khrushchev's response to Shaginyan had been 'eat Russian bread and lard!'. My thanks to Levon Hakobian for drawing my attention to this source.

<sup>64</sup> 'Za velikoye iskusstvo kommunizma', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1960/9, 9. As a senior figure in the Central Committee, Suslov had been kept informed about some of the more problematic aspects of dekada preparations since at least 1958. See RGANI 5/36/58, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 333.

other hand, the old drive for a 'flourishing' of national cultures was joined with new ideologically charged vocabulary calling for *stiraniye* (erasure of national customs), *sblizheniye* (rapprochement), and *slianiye* (fusion) between the republics.<sup>66</sup> Publicly, this new 'fusion-of-nations' policy was explained in terms of Lenin's goal of communist internationalism, whose dispersion would ultimately lead to the withering away of nations and their customs. In practice, the policy was more likely driven by worries that nationalist tendencies in the republics were undermining Soviet authority. The roots of the policy are usually traced to Khrushchev's 1958 education reform, which mandated that parents of non-Russian children should additionally be allowed to have their children schooled in Russian as well as in the native language. Those republics that rebelled most strongly against the reforms (Latvia and Azerbaijan) were soon subjected to political purges.<sup>67</sup>

The fusion-of-nations policy became the dominant topic of the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961, a little under a year after the curtain had fallen on the final *dekada*.<sup>68</sup> Speaking about art and literature on the first day of his address, Khrushchev declared that 'Soviet art has enriched the spiritual treasury of all mankind and is paving the way for the triumph of communist culture'. More specifically, he stated that Lenin had shown that a 'unified culture of communist society passes through the flourishing of the national culture', and Soviet art was apparently now demonstrating 'new features common to all Soviet culture'.<sup>69</sup> The following day, in a section of his speech entitled 'The Rapprochement of Nations and the Strengthening of the Friendship of the Peoples', he expanded on how the cultural sphere must become increasingly homogenized. Firstly, he attacked Stalin's conception of 'national form', drawing on familiar arguments that Khachaturian, Vinogradov, and Shakhnazarova had voiced almost a decade earlier:

The forms of national culture are not ossifying but being perfected; outdated ones that are inconsistent with the tasks of communist construction are fading away while new forms are

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<sup>66</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 117–20.

<sup>67</sup> Jeremy Smith, 'The Battle for Language: Opposition to Khrushchev's Education Reform in the Soviet Republics, 1958–59', *Slavic Review* 76/4 (2017), 983–1002; Oleh Fedyshyn, 'Khrushchev's "Leap Forward": National Assimilation in the USSR after Stalin', *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 48/1 (1967), 37–38.

<sup>68</sup> For an in-depth analysis of nationalities policy at the Party Congress, see Alfred Low, 'Soviet Nationality Policy and the New Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', *The Russian Review* 22/1 (1963), 3–29.

<sup>69</sup> Khrushchev's address to the Twenty-Second Party Congress, *Pravda*, 18 October 1961. 8.

emerging. The use of national colour in literature and art is quite natural, but we often encounter instances of archaism in this area.<sup>70</sup>

Next, he turned with surprising bluntness to the need to obliterate such national distinctions for the new internationalist cause:

Of course, there are people who complain about the erasure of national distinctions. To them we answer: communists are not going to conserve and perpetuate national distinctions. We will support the objective process of the ever-growing rapprochement of nations and nationalities, proceeding under the conditions of communist construction based on voluntarism and democracy.

We must improve the education of the masses in a spirit of proletarian internationalism and Soviet patriotism. With unwavering Bolshevik ruthlessness, we must eradicate the very last vestiges of nationalism.<sup>71</sup>

Although the party pronouncement stimulated some debate, it did not provoke a radical abandonment of national style in music. However, champions of national form occasionally found themselves on the back foot. In 1963 Khachaturian wrote of his disbelief when a young musician from one of the republics told him that ‘some “theorists” have suddenly begun to insist that composers should abandon the implementation of folklore and look for an “international” musical language’. In response, Khachaturian insisted that announcing ‘the fusion of national cultures’ was still premature, and that rejecting ‘the national character of music’ amounted to little more than ‘pure cosmopolitanism’ and ‘musical abstractionism’.<sup>72</sup> Consciously or not, it seems that Khachaturian knew the way the wind was blowing. The fusion-of-nations policy proved to be half-baked, and its incoherent execution meant that it failed to have any real impact or inspire new attitudes. The policy was laid to rest by Khrushchev’s successor Brezhnev, more a facet of the latter’s unwillingness to engage with nationality issues than a victory for advocates of ‘multinationalism’.<sup>73</sup> Despite the policy’s short-lived existence, the fact that it was at its zenith at the point of the cancellation of *dekadas* could hardly be a

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., *Pravda*, 19 October 1961, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>72</sup> Khachaturian, ‘O natsional’nom i internatsional’nom v sovetskom iskusstve’, in Popov (ed.), *Khachaturyan: Stat’i i vospominaniya*, 55–56. By the 1950s, ‘abstractionism’ was gaining currency as a euphemistic equivalent to ‘formalism’.

<sup>73</sup> See Kenneth Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era: Myth, Symbols and Ideology in Soviet Nationalities Policy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 58–75; Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and After the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 189–215.

coincidence. It was another sign of changing times, where the celebration of national homogeneity was superseding that of national difference.

### **Operational Problems**

As we saw in the previous chapter, certain senior voices were beginning to question the efficacy of the dekadas in furthering the development of national culture. By 1960, however, the rising tide of destalinization had created the conditions in which these issues could be aired with greater frankness. Despite some growing bad feeling towards the dekadas in Moscow, the schedule remained jam-packed. In 1955 Kyrgyz authorities petitioned to hold a dekada in Moscow the following year, only to be told that there was no capacity to host it until October 1957.<sup>74</sup> In fact, the Kyrgyz delegation did not make it to Moscow until October 1958. Festivals were increasingly being dedicated to smaller republics. In November 1955 plans were couched at the highest level for a dekada for the Udmurt autonomous republic, which never went beyond the planning stages.<sup>75</sup> The assigning of dekadas remained as transparently political as in Stalin's times. In 1957 for instance, festivals were granted to a handful of small republics in the North Caucasus (Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygea, and Karachay-Cherkessia), whose citizens had just been repatriated by Khrushchev, reversing mass war-time deportations perpetrated by Stalin.<sup>76</sup>

Following the trail of archival documents, it seems that the strongest fight to cancel the dekadas came from the very organization that founded them: the former KDI, now rechristened the Ministry of Culture. But while in the Stalin years this organization had held virtually supreme control in the arts, under Khrushchev it became increasingly locked in power struggles with other institutions, especially the Central Committee's own Cultural Department, which existed as an interface between government and cultural life.

The earliest evidence of criticism towards the dekadas focused on their scale, and overambitious organizers were accused of advocating quantity over quality. Authorities especially began to grumble about the excessive number of participants, which were often

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<sup>74</sup> RGANI 5/36/6, 54.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>76</sup> See Smith, *Red Nations*, 151–62.

inflated well beyond initially approved plans. The Ministry of Finance had originally approved 1,072 participants for the 1955 Latvian dekada, but this figure ended up being exceeded by more than six hundred.<sup>77</sup> In 1956 Uzbek authorities approved and submitted plans for a dekada that would require 2,219 participants, and a massive schedule of activities to include six operas, four ballets, four music dramas, ten plays, and four films. Moscow officials quickly sought to temper the enthusiasm, insisting that the number of participants should be capped at a thousand, in order to 'make it possible to prepare the dekada with real creative collectives who are able to fully represent the culture of the republic'.<sup>78</sup>

A 1960 report from the Ministry of Culture shows that the battle to cancel the dekadas would now be fought on such practical arguments, for which an avalanche of incriminating evidence was easily found. The Ministry noted that most dekada productions were being performed to halls that were barely half-full. Taking the June 1956 Armenian dekada as an example, the report noted that while operas and ballets drew audiences of a moderate three-quarters capacity, other theatre collectives had struggled to half-fill the theatres. One production had only managed to fill their venue to fifteen percent of its capacity. Glossing over the possibility that the low figures might be the result of a disenchanted public, the report suggested that they were symptomatic of a Moscow public faced with excessive choice, which was spreading the potential audiences too thin. This was borne out by the sheer number of productions that were now crammed into dekada schedules. During the 1956 Armenian dekada, performances were shown every day across eight venues, whilst the Latvian dekada of December 1955 had similarly seen near-daily performances across seven venues.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile in the republics, the sheer weight of dekada preparations was often bringing cultural life to a complete standstill and was straining the time and resources of republican opera houses. In preparation for the Bashkir dekada, mounted in the summer of 1956, the opera house in Ufa had cancelled all performances in the preceding two

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<sup>77</sup> RGANI 5/36/23, 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 43–44, 59.

<sup>79</sup> RGALI 2329/6/147, 5.

months to focus on dekada rehearsals. Going to even greater lengths, the Spendiarov State Theatre in Armenia had terminated all weekday productions for nine months leading up to its 1956 dekada to free up time for rehearsing an elaborate menu of operas and ballets. Similar practices had been uncovered in Turkmenistan, Belorussia, and Lithuania prior to their dekadas. The report pointed out that such intense preoccupation with dekada preparations was impeding cultural progress, since opera houses were funnelling resources into enormous flagship productions of dated repertoire rather than supporting new works.<sup>80</sup> The restriction of cultural growth was evident in other ways. Often monumental cultural achievements were being contrived or simply falsified. For instance, the Aurgazinsky Reiki Choir had been founded especially for the Bashkir dekada, only to be immediately disbanded afterwards, while a similar fate had befallen a dance ensemble organized shortly before the 1959 Uzbek dekada. Extra musicians and dancers were apparently being routinely hired on short-term contracts to buttress the various national orchestras, choirs, and ballet companies only to be laid off as soon as the festivities were over.<sup>81</sup>

Many of these problems were symptomatic of the fact that funds lavished on each republic for its dekada were vastly disproportionate to its usual resources, such that the level of artistic accomplishment shown in Moscow was hardly sustainable. Often the sum allotted to a republic for its dekada was similar to or even exceeded its entire annual arts subsidy. For example, in 1954 Belorussia was granted 9.3 million roubles to hold a dekada in Moscow, while its entire annual arts subsidy for that year was 8.3 million. Latvia was allocated 4.7 million roubles for its dekada, when its arts subsidy was only a little higher at 5.5 million roubles. The budget granted to the Armenians for their 1956 dekada exceeded the annual budget for all the theatres and musical institutions in Armenia.<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, the report offered two recommendations: firstly 'to change the procedure for selecting participants and for holding dekadas that have already been approved' and

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



secondly 'to further replace the practice of holding dekadas with other forms of displaying the achievements of national art'.<sup>83</sup>

Nikolai Mikhailov, the Minister for Culture, sent a summary of the report to the Central Committee. Mikhailov seems to have made it his mission to have the dekadas expunged from Moscow's cultural life, soon supplying another report highlighting more evidence of operational disasters. He noted that in addition to stretching the resources of institutions in the republics, the dekadas were placing undue strain on Moscow theatres, which were rendered otherwise inactive during intensive rehearsal periods. Between 1955 and 1958 the Bolshoi had lost 141 business days to dekada preparations.<sup>84</sup> The complexities of scheduling multiple Moscow theatres during the dekadas are borne out in other archival sources. In January 1958 Mikhailov visited Georgia to assess dekada productions, only to discover that the Moscow theatre to which one production had been assigned was too small, and a new venue had to be procured at short notice.<sup>85</sup> Mikhailov again cited the vast sums being invested in the dekadas (between seven and eleven million roubles per dekada),<sup>86</sup> though he added that often the host republic would equal Moscow's investment with supplementary funds of its own. Poor attendance figures were again cited, but Mikhailov no longer put this down to over-stretched audiences. Rather, the productions themselves were 'not of significant artistic interest to Moscow spectators'.<sup>87</sup> He complained that these 'imperfect works are hastily written' for the dekadas, but 'their shortcomings are smoothed out or entirely hushed up by critics, since they approach all dekada events with the clemency of "festivity"'.<sup>88</sup> Dekada productions were seldom being staffed purely by native musicians (whether on permanent or temporary contracts), but were often propped up by members of the Bolshoi's resident

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>84</sup> RGANI 5/36/83, 19.

<sup>85</sup> RGANI 5/36/58, 1–2.

<sup>86</sup> I. V. Shorokhova suggests that the dekadas suffered from an overall reduction of funding in the arts in the late Khrushchev era, citing evidence that the Tatar dekada had cost seven million roubles while the Karelian dekada had cost four million. While it is evident that Moscow officials were eager to curb both spending and scope, these figures do not represent anything outside of the usual fluctuations in dekada spending in the post-war period. See Shorokhova, 'Dekada karel'skogo iskusstva i literaturī v Moskve 1959 goda', *Ucheniye zapiska petrozavodskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 2017/7, 23.

<sup>87</sup> RGANI 5/36/83, 19.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 19.

choir and orchestra.<sup>89</sup> More shockingly still, dekada works were apparently being routinely prepared behind closed doors and were sometimes never even shown at home, or when they were it was in stripped-down, cheaper productions. Saifiddinov's *Pulat and Gulru* and Vasily Zolotaryov's Belorussian ballet *Hearts Aflame* were never shown to live audiences in their host republic. Mikhailov again highlighted the hypocrisy that these productions were prepared during months of closure in which the theatres 'stopped providing artistic services to the working people of the republic'.<sup>90</sup>

Having dragged the dekadas well and truly through the mud, Mikhailov turned to recommending other ways of promoting national music. These included touring the best productions not only to Moscow but to the other cities across the Soviet Union, as well as to industrial and agricultural regions. Meanwhile, Moscow theatres could stage their own productions of works created in the autonomous republics, inviting artists and directors from the republics to shape their creation. This would feed into a more fluid exchange of musical tours between republics, as well as encouraging the creative exchange of conductors, directors, choreographers, and performers between republics. Mikhailov's recommendations also suggested harnessing modern technology for promoting the cross-fertilization of national music by means of radio, television, cinema, and pre-concert lectures, as well as better co-opting the powers of institutions such as the Composers' Union and the publishing houses Muzgiz and Sovetskiy kompozitor.<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, some voices rallied against Mikhailov's recommendations. In March 1959, Dmitry Polikarpov and Polikarp Lebedev wrote to the Central Committee to contest Mikhailov's proposal to cancel the dekadas. Polikarpov ran the Central Committee's own culture department; Lebedev, himself a former KDI chairman, also carried substantial authority. They accepted Mikhailov's new ideas for promoting transnationalism in the arts to create 'extensive propaganda to no less an extent than the dekadas of literature and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 19–20. At the Tajik dekada 40 chorus members and 74 orchestral musicians from the Bolshoi were substituted into the cast, while similar numbers were substituted at the Bashkir and Turkmen dekadas. The Estonian, Georgian, and Kyrgyz dekadas made do with about half that number of Bolshoi recruits (about 30–40).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

art', but condemned the 'senselessness of ending the established practice of holding dekadas'. Apparently worried that moves might immediately be made towards abolition, they noted that preparations for Azerbaijani, Moldavian, and Ukrainian dekadas were already well-advanced, and that it would be negligent for this work to go to waste. Polikarpov and Lebedev suggested that the 'question of the fate of the established tradition of holding dekadas could be considered later', and even suggested (somewhat misleadingly) that many of Mikhailov's proposed dekada alternatives had already been set out by the Central Committee resolution 'On major shortcomings in the organization of theatre tours'.<sup>92</sup>

I have found no archival evidence of further discussions, but if and when they occurred, they clearly went Mikhailov's way; Polikarpov and Lebedev's dekada nostalgia was no match for Mikhailov's reasoned arguments. The Ukrainian dekada went ahead, but it would be the last, and the Azerbaijani and Moldavian festivals were shelved. This was one of Mikhailov's last victories as culture minister before being removed in a government reshuffle in early 1960, demoted to the position of ambassador to Indonesia. From a public perspective, the withdrawal of the dekadas was enacted quietly. *Pravda* continued to devote substantial coverage to the dekadas right until the end. On the first day of the final dekada, *Pravda* published an anonymous editorial enumerating the dekadas' successes over the past quarter century, and specified some of the varied means by which transnational art was now being celebrated around the Soviet Union. But the editorial made no statement that the dekada it was promoting would be the last.<sup>93</sup>

Mikhailov's arguments were hardly new; some version of most of them had been brewing since the late 1930s (see Chapters 4 and 5). The conditions for the final deterioration of the dekadas through the 1950s, I have shown, are attributable to a general decline in opera, destalinization, the growth of internationalism, and Khrushchev's fusion-of-nations policy, the last of which sought (ultimately unsuccessfully) to undo the celebration of national difference that had been so prized under Stalinism. Dekadas had

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. In fact, as discussed above, the resolution in question had only suggested a general need for reform without stipulating concrete plans or recommendations.

<sup>93</sup> 'Velikoye iskusstvo naroda', *Pravda*, 12 November 1960, 1.

come to represent the tedium and 'stagnation' that would envelop Soviet culture in the following two decades. The satirist Mikhail Veller, for instance, evocatively recalls them like this:

The State Kremlin Palace would proclaim with gusto: 'For [the anniversary of the] Great October [Revolution]: fifteen dekadas of national art from fifteen fraternal Soviet republics!' And the republics would kowtow and puff up with happiness. Every evening there would be a concert of national art, a national performance, or some other unbearable twaddle [*khrenoten*], pumped up to the very limit with the blossoming of national art. Dancers pranced about, chorus girls screeched, and citizens turned off their televisions and went off to brush their teeth before going to bed.<sup>94</sup>

Veller's description is perhaps instructive, since hardly any of the new repertoire unveiled at the post-war dekadas was ever performed again. In the Brezhnev era, commentators hardly hid their embarrassment about the national kitsch that the dekadas had propagated. However ineffective Khrushchev's hope to erase national identity (or nationalism as he saw it), his hope to do so was perhaps judicious, since the Soviet project of encouraging a 'blossoming' of national identities ultimately proved to be a substantial cause in its collapse. But the dekadas had clearly proven far more effective at creating the illusion of cultural development than truly shaping cultural progress along accepted Soviet lines. Despite the liberalizing agenda of the 'Thaw', in the end cultural homogenization under one blanket 'Soviet' identity remained as much Khrushchev's ambition as it had been Stalin's so far as nationalities policy was concerned. Perversely, it was precisely the dekadas' anticolonial stance towards the Soviet imperial project that constituted the foremost factor in their demise.

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<sup>94</sup> Mikhail Veller, *Legendi Arbata* (Moscow: AST, 2010), 54.

## Conclusion

At the outset of this dissertation, I sketched an approach to the Soviet Union that argued for a more nuanced position vis-à-vis its imperial status. Ronald Suny, discussing this issue of whether the Soviet Union was an empire or not, has suggested a 'radical middle position' whereby it 'became an empire despite the best intentions of many of its leaders and its ideological underpinnings, and over time displayed features of both a modernizing empire and a nationalizing state'.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely the model of empire that has emerged over the course of this dissertation (especially in Chapters 2, 3, and 4), namely that transnational musical exchange within the Soviet Union echoed the inconsistencies and nuances of the system it served. In musical discourse, national traditions were construed as untapped cultural treasures that would feed a vision of cultural modernity distinct from the perceived anti-populist 'formalism' of Western music. At times, the self-assurance that the Soviet Union had achieved some kind of post-colonial, transcultural equilibrium inspired an arrogance that rendered commentators blind to acts of contemporary Russian imperialism occurring before their own eyes. Likewise, when entrenched national traditions seemed to clash with 'progressive' Soviet values, such as the promotion of women's rights in Central Asia, works such as Glière's *Gyulsara* sought both to legitimize and propagandize colonial exploits at the periphery.

Such observations, however, have furnished a scholarly consensus that Soviet cultural policy sought to shape national art in the image of Western art music, and so hoped to refashion peripheral cultures in the image of its imperial big brother.<sup>2</sup> This consensus has spurred a tendency to downplay the ways in which anticolonial discourse could also produce forward-thinking insights about the Western tendency to culturally dominate and essentialize the exotic. Such attitudes could also elicit surprisingly prescient discussions about the need to balance preservation with modernization in the sphere of national culture. This is especially evident in the discourse surrounding the Central-Asian

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Suny, 'Studying Empires', *Ab Imperio* 1 (2008), 208.

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of such literature, see my Introduction.

republics (especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), at whose national dekadas such issues were subjected to serious and considered debate. Similarly, while some scholars have emphasized the colonialist qualities of Glière's national works, in Chapter 3 I demonstrated that a certain colonial self-awareness was bound up in contemporary criticism and even the composer's own remarks about these works. Such observations point to the need for a more nuanced understanding of how colonial and anticolonial attitudes interacted in transnational cultural production.

For all the progressive, anti-orientalist rhetoric of Soviet discourse, the Russian-trained composers who were sent to the republics continued to rely on nineteenth-century idioms and techniques to depict the national musical traditions they were assigned. Their works adopted the increasingly standardized markers of socialist realist aesthetics: kuchkist orientalist tropes, folksy national styles, and a conservative tonal/harmonic musical language. However, this was not necessarily tantamount to a homogenization of musical style, and many found their independent compositional voices even within the sanctioned aesthetic framework. Correspondingly, many natives of these republics perceived genuine national content in these works, and they continued to be performed for decades to come (the operas of Brusilovsky, Vlasov, and Feré, for instance). On one level, composers who worked in the republics were motivated by the evident career-developing potential of this politically valued work. But most still seem to have held their adopted/co-opted republics in high regard, and were genuinely motivated to place their talents at the service of the nation. If we are to regard them as cultural colonialists, it should be with the proviso that they were hardly cultural ignoramuses intent on imposing the cultural tenets of the 'occident'. As to an analysis of genuine folk content in these works, this is a topic that I have considered only tangentially in this dissertation. More in-depth engagement with the music itself would be a welcome avenue for further research, both in the interests of a better understanding how national operas (mis)represented national culture and in order to bring further attention to those works that stand on their own merits.

The national dekadas proved to be an especially fruitful space wherein enlightened anticolonial ideas existed in discord with a certain colonial amnesia. At the same time, it is hard to overstate the enormous influence they had on Soviet cultural life. In the peripheral nations especially, the dekadas forged many illustrious careers, captured imaginations, and influenced ideas about national culture under Stalinism and in the following decades. In the first two chapters, I showed that in just a few months after their inception, and despite the unstable conditions of cultural revolution and a repressive cultural environment, the dekadas became rapidly and firmly embedded into Soviet cultural life, attaining a cult-like status analogous to Stalin's own. But despite their cultural prominence, it seems ultimately that only the echo chamber-like conditions of Stalinism itself could fully sustain them. Recent scholarship has become increasingly receptive to this facet of Stalinist culture. Malte Rolfe, for instance, has suggested that Soviet culture's insularity resulted in a 'hall of mirrors' effect, where 'inner sovietization' of culture was achieved by the constant reflection and refraction of a canon of approved cultural symbols.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin suggest that Soviet ideological discourse was 'reproductive in its own functions and in its understanding of itself'.<sup>4</sup> Such cultural conditions allowed for the co-existence of a myriad of contradictions: celebration and repression, colonialism and anticolonialism, and an avowed openness within the confines of an inward-looking worldview. But clues that the dekadas were failing to bring about the nurturing and harmonious coexistence of national cultures were already becoming evident to some by the late 1930s. As was seen in Chapter 5, curmudgeonly remarks in meetings and cagily phrased press articles were beginning to hint that the rosy picture of national art presented at the dekadas was far from a true representation of cultural life in the republics. In their post-war revival, and without the patronage of the 'father of the nations', their precarious efficacy in demonstrating and developing national culture began to unravel.

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<sup>3</sup> Malte Rolf, 'A Hall of Mirrors: Sovietizing Culture under Stalinism', *Slavic Review* 68/3 (2009), 601-30.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Evgeny Dobrenko, *Late Stalinism: The Aesthetics of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 244.

Perhaps the ultimate failing of the *dekadas*, however, was that they evinced a fundamental misunderstanding of the power of national identity. In his famous formulation that art should be ‘national in form, socialist in content’ Stalin dismissed nationality as something inert, pliable towards ideological ends, and ultimately harmless. Most scholars agree that Soviet policy towards nationalities was a principal factor in the ultimate collapse of the system. Yuri Slezkine, for instance, has shown that the Soviet policy of obsessively promoting ethnic distinction ultimately undermined its broader aim of supplanting nationalism with international communism.<sup>5</sup> Such a view continues to influence the nationalistically charged discourse in Russia. Vladimir Putin, in his much reported-on essay published months before his invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, claimed that Lenin’s plan to form a ‘federation of equal republics’ who all had the right to ‘freely secede from the Union [...] planted in the foundation of our statehood the most dangerous time bomb’.<sup>6</sup> The bomb went off with the Soviet Union’s collapse, and the long-established phony mechanisms that had been meant merely to give the pretence of independence and ‘self-determination’ enabled multiple rebellions against the centre. Khrushchev’s policies to restrain national self-expression and foster an increasingly globalized and internationalist cultural space, discussed in Chapter 6, were thus born of a legitimate (though belated) realization that Soviet nationality policy was on a collision course. While his fusion of nations policy was a *coup de grâce* for the *dekadas*, it failed to avert the national unrest that would come to a head in the following decades.

Since the opening of the former Soviet archives in the 1990s, scholars have gleaned many fascinating secrets, though they have been less inclined to travel to the archives outside Russia in the former Soviet republics. This study, too, has been concerned primarily with archival sources found in Moscow. However, with mounting political tension between Russia and the West, access to the former’s archives is becoming increasingly elusive to Western scholars. With the waning of the near-

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<sup>5</sup> Yuri Slezkine, ‘The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism’, *Slavic Review* 53/2 (1994), 414–52.

<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Putin, ‘On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians’, *President of the Russian Federation Website*, 12 July 2021 <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>> (accessed 10 January 2023).



transparent access of the 1990s, local archives in the former Soviet republics are likely to prove a valuable resource to researchers. More serious consideration of these archives would benefit Soviet music studies more generally, supplying a greater understanding of how musical life operated at the periphery, and how it responded to and operated independently from the centralized power of Moscow. Aside from the new arguments outlined above, this thesis has sought to provide a glimpse into Soviet musical life at the periphery, which could be as vibrant and bustling as that of Moscow or Leningrad. There remains a wealth of unexplored musical works, archives, and reception histories, and the task of disinterring and re-assessing will be of no small magnitude.

## Appendix 1 – Tables of Dekada Productions

### Pre-war Dekadas

Performances on dates that Stalin attended are given in bold. I have limited this list solely to musical works, although especially from 1940 these were widely supplemented with displays of drama and literature.<sup>1</sup>

#### UKRAINE, 11–21 March 1936

Performance Date	Composer/Work	Genre
<b>11, 12</b> (matinée), <b>13, 17, 20</b>	Semyon Hulak-Artemovsky, <i>Zaporozhets za Dunayem</i> [A Cossack Beyond the Danube] (1863)	Opera
<b>12, 15, 19</b>	Nikolai Rimsky-Kosakov, <i>Snegurochka</i> [The Snow Maiden] (1882)	Opera
<b>14, 16, 18</b> (matinée and evening)	Mykola Lysenko, <i>Natalka-Poltavka</i> [Natalka from Poltava] (1889)	Opera
<b>21</b>	Concert	

#### KAZAKHSTAN, 17–23 May 1936

<b>17, 19, 21</b>	Yevgeny Brusilovsky, <i>Kiz-Zhibek</i> [The Silk Maiden] (1934, rev. 1981)	Music drama
<b>18, 20, 22</b>	Yevgeny Brusilovsky, <i>Zhalbir</i> (1935, rev. 1938, 1946)	Music drama
<b>23</b>	Concert	

#### GEORGIA, 5–15 January 1937

<b>5, 6</b>	Zakharia Paliashvili, <i>Daisi</i> [Twilight] (1923)	Opera
<b>7, 10</b>	Meliton Balanchivadze, <i>Darejan tsbieri</i> [Darejan the Insidious] (1912, rev. 1926, 1937)	Opera
<b>9, 12, 15</b>	Zakharia Paliashvili, <i>Abesalom i Èteri</i> (1919)	Opera
<b>11, 12</b> (matinée), <b>13</b>	Dolidze, <i>Kéto i Koté</i> (1919)	Operetta
<b>8</b>	Concert	

#### UZBEKISTAN, 21–30 May 1937

<b>21, 22, 26, 28</b>	Reinhold Glière, <i>Gyulsara</i> (1936, rev. 1949)	Music drama
<b>23, 24, 25, 27</b>	Viktor Uspensky and Georgy Mushel, <i>Farkhad i Shirin</i> (1936)	Music drama

#### AZERBAIJAN, 5–15 April 1938

<b>5, 6, 14</b>	Uzeir Hajibeyov, <i>Kyor-ogli</i> (1937)	Opera
<b>7, 8, 13</b>	Reinhold Glière, <i>Shakh-Senem</i> (1927, rev. 1934)	Opera
<b>9, 10</b>	Uzeir Hajibeyov, <i>Arshin mal alan</i> (1913)	Musical comedy

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller list of works performed at the dekadas, see 'Dekadi' iskusstva i literaturı v Moskve', in P. A. Markov (ed.), *Teatral'naya éntsiklopediya* (Moscow: Sovetskaya éntsiklopediya, 1961–67).

11, 12	Abdul Mahomayev, <i>Nergiz</i> (1933, rev. 1938 by Reinhold Glière)	Opera
15	Concert	

**KYRGYZSTAN, 26 May – 4 June 1939**

26, 27, 30, 3	Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and Abdīlas Maldībayev, <i>Aychurek</i> [The Lunar Beauty] (1939)	Opera
28, 29	Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and Abdīlas Maldībayev, <i>Adzhal orduna</i> [Not Death, but Life] (1938)	Music drama
31	Vlasov and Feré, <i>Altin kiz</i> [The Golden Maiden] (1937)	Music drama
4	Concert	

**ARMENIA, 20–29 October 1939**

20, 21	Aleksandr Spendiaryan, <i>Almast</i> (1930)	Opera
22, 23	Armen Tigranyan, <i>Anush</i> (1912, rev. 1935)	Opera
24, 27, 28	Aram Khachaturian, <i>Schastye</i> [Happiness] (1939, rev. as <i>Gayane</i> 1942, 1957)	Ballet
25, 26	Haro Stepanyan, <i>Lusabatsin</i> [At Dawn] (1938)	Opera
29	Concert	

**BELORUSSIA, 5–15 June 1940**

5, 3, 13	Yevgeny Tikotsky, <i>Mikhas Podgorny</i> (1939)	Opera
7, 8	Aleksey Turenkov, <i>Tsvetok schastya</i> [The Flower of Happiness] (1940)	Opera
9, 10	Mikhail Kroshner, <i>Solovey</i> [The Nightingale] (1939)	Ballet
11, 12	Anatol Bogatīryov, <i>V pushchakh Polesya</i> [In the Forests of Polesye] (1939)	Opera
15	Concert	

**BURYAT-MONGOLIA, 20–27 October 1940**

21, 22, 26	Pavel Berlinsky, <i>Bair</i> (1938, rev. 1940 by Baudorzhi Yampilov)	Music drama
24	Viktor Moroshkin, <i>Ėrzhén</i> (1940)	Music drama
20, 23, 25	Markian Frolov, <i>Ėnkhé-Bulat bator</i> [Ėnkhé the Steel Warrior] (1940)	Opera
27	Concert	

**TAJIKISTAN, 12–20 April 1941**

12, 19	Sergey Balasanyan, <i>Vosstaniye Vosé</i> [The Uprising of Vosé] (1939, rev. 1958)	Opera
13, 14	Sergey Balasanyan and Samuil Urbakh <i>Lola</i> [The Tulip] (1939)	'Musical performance in two parts'
15, 16	Sergey Balasanyan, <i>Kuznets Kova</i> [Kova the Blacksmith] (1941)	Opera
17, 18	Aleksandr Lensky, <i>Dve rozī</i> [Two Roses] (1941)	Ballet
20	Concert	

## Post-war Dekadas

### UKRAINE, 15–26 June 1951

Composer	Work	Genre
Konstantin Dankevich	<i>Bogdan Khmel'nitsky</i> (1951)	Opera
Hulak-Artemovsky	<i>Zaporozhets za Dunayem</i> [A Cossack Beyond the Danube] (1863)	Opera
Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov	<i>Tsarskaya nevesta</i> [The Tsar's Bride] (1899)	Opera
Anatoly Svechnikov	<i>Marusya Boguslavka</i> (1951)	Ballet

### LITHUANIA, 4–15 March 1954

Aleksandr Borodin	<i>Knyaz Igor</i> (1890)	Opera
Giuseppe Verdi	<i>La traviata</i> (1853)	Opera
Antanas Račiūnas	<i>Marie</i> (1953)	Opera
Julius Juzeliūnas	<i>Na beregu morya</i> [On the Seashore] (1953)	Ballet

### BELORUSSIA, 11–21 February 1955

Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Yevgeniy Onegin</i> (1879)	Opera
Stanisław Moniuszko	<i>Straszny dwór</i> [The Haunted Manor] (1865)	Opera
Yevgeny Tikotskiy	<i>Dedushka iz Poles'ya</i> [The Grandfather from Polesye] (original title: <i>Alesya</i> , 1944, rev. 1953)	Opera
Vasily Zolotaryov	<i>Plamenniye serdtsa</i> [Hearts Aflame] (1955)	Ballet

### TURKMENISTAN, 14–24 October 1955

Adrian Shaposhnikov and Dantgatar Ovezov	<i>Shasenem i Garib</i> (1944, rev. 1955)	Opera
Klimenty Korchmaryov	<i>Aldar-Kose</i> (1942)	Ballet
Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Yevgeniy Onegin</i> (1879, performed in Turkmen)	Opera

### LATVIA, 14–26 December 1955

Alfrēds Kalniņš	<i>Baņuta</i> (1920, rev. 1937, 1940)	Opera
Marģers Zariņš	<i>Uz jauno krastu</i> [Towards the New Shore] (1954)	Opera
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov	<i>Skazaniye o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i deve Fevronii</i> [The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya] (1907)	Opera
Ādolfs Skulte	<i>Brīvības sakta</i> [The Brooch of Freedom] (1950)	Ballet
Anatols Liepiņš	<i>Layma</i> (1947)	Ballet

**BASHKIRIA, 27 May – 5 June 1956**

Zagir Ismagilov	<i>Salavat Yulayev</i> (1954, rev. 1986)	Opera
Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov	<i>Tsarskaya nevesta</i> [The Tsar's Bride] (1899)	Opera
Zagir Ismagilov and Lev Stepanov	<i>Zhuravlinaya pesn</i> [The Crane Song] (1941)	Ballet
Aleksandr Krein	<i>Laurentsiya</i> (1939)	Ballet

**ARMENIA, 4–13 June 1956**

Armen Tigranyan	<i>Anush</i> (1912, rev. 1935)	Opera
Armen Tigranyan	<i>David-Bek</i> (1940-49)	Opera
Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Pikovaya dama</i> [The Queen of Spades] (1890)	Opera
Tigran Chukhadzhyan	<i>Arshak Erkrord</i> [Arshak II] (1868)	Opera
Grigor Yeghiazarian	<i>Sevan</i> (1956, rev. 1982 as <i>The Lake of Drams</i> )	Ballet

**ESTONIA, 14–25 December 1956**

Eugen Kapp	<i>Ogni mshcheniya</i> [Fire of Vengeance] (1945)	Opera
Gustav Ernesaks	<i>Ruka ob ruku</i> [Hand in Hand] (1955, rev. 1965)	Opera
Modest Musorgsky	<i>Boris Godunov</i> (1874)	Opera
Lidiya Auster	<i>Tiyana</i> (1955)	Ballet
Eugene Kapp	<i>Zolotopryakhi</i> [The Gold Spinners] (1956)	Ballet

**TAJIKISTAN, 9–20 April 1957**

Sharofiddin Saifiddinov	<i>Pulat i Gulru</i> (1957)	Opera
Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Mazepa</i> (1881–83)	Opera
Aleksandr Lensky	<i>Dilbar</i> (1954)	Ballet
Sergey Balasanyan	<i>Leyli i Medzhnun</i> (1947, rev. 1957, 1964)	Ballet

**TATAR ASSR, 24 May – 4 June 1957**

Nazib Zhiganov	<i>Altinchech</i> [The Blonde] (1941)	Opera
Nazib Zhiganov	<i>Dzhalil</i> (1957)	Opera
Khasnulla Valiullin	<i>Samat</i> (1957, rev. 1977)	Opera
Farid Yarullin	<i>Shurale</i> (1941, orch. by Favi Vitachek in 1945)	Ballet

**KABARDINO-BALKARIA, 20 June – 1 July 1957**

Truvor Sheybler	<i>Narti</i> (1957)	Opera-ballet
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**ADYGEA AND KARACHAY–CHERKESSIA, 7-11 October 1957**

No operas/ballets performed

**YAKUTIA, 10-17 December 1957**

Mark Zhirkov	<i>Nyurgun Bootura Stremiltelniy</i> [Nyurgun Bootur the Swift] (1947, rev. 1957 by Genrikh Litinsky)	Opera
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**GEORGIA, 21 March – 1 April 1958**

Zakharia Paliashvili	<i>Daisi</i> [Twilight] (1923)	Opera
David Toradze	<i>Nevesta Severa</i> [The Bride of the North] (1958)	Opera
Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Orleanskaya deva</i> [The Maid of Orleans] (1881)	Opera
David Toradze	<i>Gorda</i> (1949)	Ballet
Aleksey Machavariani	<i>Othello</i> (1957)	Ballet

**KYRGYZSTAN, 14–25 October 1958**

Vladimir Vlasov, Vladimir Feré, and Abdilas Maldibayev	<i>Toktogul</i> (1958)	Opera
Pyotr Tchaikovsky	<i>Oprichnik</i> [The Guardsman] (1874)	Opera
Vladimir Vlasov and Vladimir Feré	<i>Anar</i> (1940)	Ballet
Mikhail Raukhverger	<i>Cholpon</i> (1943, rev. 1958)	Ballet

**KAZAKHSTAN, 12–23 December 1958**

Mukan Tulebayev	<i>Birzhan i Sara</i> (1946, rev. 1957)	Opera
Akhmet Zhubanov and Latif Khamidi	<i>Abay</i> (1944)	Opera
Nurgis Tlendiyev, Lev Stepanov, and Yevgeny Manayev	<i>Dorogoy druzhbi</i> [Dear Friendship] (1958)	Ballet
Boris Asafiev	<i>Bakhchisarayskiy fontan</i> [The Fountain of Bakhchisaray] (1933)	Ballet

**UZBEKISTAN, 14–24 February 1959**

Mukhtar Ashrafi	<i>Dilerom</i> [The Dealer] (1958)	Opera
Talib Sadikov	<i>Zaynab i Omon</i> (1958)	Opera
Solomon Yudakov	<i>Prodelki Maysari</i> [Maysara's Pranks] (1931)	Opera
Ikram Akbarov	<i>Mechta</i> [The Daydream] (1959)	Ballet
Lev Laputin	<i>Maskarad</i> [Masquerade] (1956)	Ballet

**AZERBAIJAN, 22–31 May 1959**

Fikter Amirov	<i>Sevil</i> (1952)	Opera
Uzeir Hajibeyov	<i>Kyor-ogli</i> (1937)	Opera
Kara Karayev	<i>Sem krasavits</i> [Seven Beauties] (1952)	Ballet
Afrashiyab Badabeyli	<i>Devichya bashnya</i> [The Maiden's Tower] (1940)	Ballet
Sultan Hajibeyov	<i>Gyulshen</i> (1950)	Ballet

**KARELIA, 21 August – 1 September 1959**

Ruvim Pergament	<i>Kumokha</i> (1944–46, rev. 1959)	Musical comedy
Helmer-Rayner Sinisalo	<i>Sampo</i> (1959)	Ballet
Konstantin Listov	<i>Shumi, nash les</i> [Shumi, Our Forest] (1957)	Operetta

**BURYATIA, 27 November – 8 December 1959**

Dandar Ayusheyev	<i>Pobrattimī</i> [Sworn Brothers] (1959, rev. 1962 as <i>Bratya</i> [Brothers])	Opera
Aleksandr Borodin	<i>Knyaz Igor</i> [Prince Igor] (1890)	Opera
Zhigzhit Batayev and Boris Mayzel'	<i>Vo imya lyubovi</i> [In the Name of Love] (1959)	Ballet
Baudorzhi Yampilov and Lev Knipper	<i>Krasavitsa Angara</i> [The Beautiful River Angara] (1959, rev. 1970)	Ballet-poem

**DAGESTAN, 8–19 April 1960**

No operas/ballets performed

**MOLDOVA, 27 May – 5 June 1960**

David Gershfel'd	<i>Grozovan</i> (1960)	Opera
Aleksey Stırcha	<i>Serdtse Domniki</i> [The Heart of Domnika] (1960)	Opera
Vasiliy Zagorskiy	<i>Rassvet</i> [Dawn] (1960)	Ballet
Éduard Lazarev	<i>Slomanniĭ mech</i> [The Broken Sword] (1960)	Ballet

**NORTH OSSETIA, 26 August – 4 September 1960**

Khristof Pliyev	<i>Kosta</i> (1960)	Opera
Khristof Pliyev	<i>Vesenyaya pesnya</i> [Spring Song] (1957)	Operetta

**UKRAINE, 12–21 November 1960**

Heorhy Mayboroda	<i>Arsenal</i> (1960)	Opera
Herman Zhukovsky	<i>Persha vesna</i> [First Spring] (1959)	Opera
Vadim Homolyaka	<i>Chernoye zoloto</i> [Black Gold] (1957)	Ballet
Mykola Lysenko	<i>Taras Bulba</i> (1880–91)	Opera
Aleksey Verstovsky	<i>Askoldova mogila</i> [Askold's Grave] (1835)	Opera
Mikhail Skorul'skiy	<i>Lesnaya pesnya</i> [Forest Song] (1936)	Ballet

## Appendix 2 – Letter from Aram Khachaturian to the newspaper *Aztag* (Beirut, Lebanon)

27 August 1973, Moscow<sup>1</sup>

The Lebanese-Armenian newspaper *Aztag*<sup>2</sup> recently published two articles: an editorial and another by a certain person calling himself Dr Oganesyán. This article raises the question that I have allegedly stated somewhere that I am not Armenian but Russian. It refers to the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, which published an interview with me on my seventieth birthday. In this interview, it was said that I was born in Georgia, that I am Armenian by nationality, but in 1929 I went to Moscow, studied here, and received an education here.

I [first] went to Armenia in 1921,<sup>3</sup> and have not since severed ties with my native Armenia, which I visit almost every year. It is no coincidence that I received the title of Honoured Artist of the Armenian SSR, that back in 1955 I received the title of People's Artist of the Armenian SSR, that I was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR from the Armenian SSR, and finally, that I am a full member of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. I say all this because it is the best proof of my strong connection with my homeland, that I consider myself an Armenian and that I am proud of it. I've never denied it anywhere.

The interview given to the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya* does not explicitly state that I am Russian. It refers to my education and upbringing. These people who quibble over words are bad people. They don't want to understand (although I think they understand quite well) that there's nothing to fault. Why? Because all my life (and I am

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<sup>1</sup> My principal source for this translation is the version published and edited by Viktor Yuzefovich, who cites a copy found in the personal archive of Ye. M. Mirzoyan, housed in Yerevan, though no precise archival reference is given. The letter also appears heavily abridged in Khachaturian's published letters, though with syntactical idiosyncrasies suggesting that a primary source has also been consulted. See Yuzefovich (ed.), 'Otmechaya 80-letiyeye A. I. Khachaturyana', *Sovetskaya muzika* 1983/7, 66–67; Aram Khachaturyan, *Pis'ma* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2005), 246–248.

<sup>2</sup> *Aztag* was based in Lebanon, where there was a substantial diaspora of Armenians who had fled after the Revolution. The publication was the mouthpiece of the Dashnak party, who had ruled Armenia before the Soviet take-over, and it largely adopted an anti-Soviet stance.

<sup>3</sup> Yuzefovich's version erroneously has 1929 here, and 1921 in the previous paragraph. *Pis'ma* has the correct dates.



now seventy years old) all my activities, creativity and practice speak to the fact that I have been, am, and always will be Armenian. My music has many roots in Armenian folk music. Apart from the great Russian composers, I consider Komitas to be one of my teachers, as well as [Aleksandr] Spendiaryan, with whom I had the good fortune to be personally acquainted. My annual trips to Armenia attest to my active participation in the life of the Armenian Republic.

Back in 1939, when the Dekada of Armenian Art was held in Moscow, I sat there in Yerevan for almost seven months without break and wrote the ballet *Schast'ye* so that the Armenians could show this ballet in Moscow. Of all the republics, Armenia was the first to bring a ballet to a dekada, since before that all the other republics had only brought operas. Moving forward, I took a very active part both as a composer and organizer in all the musical festivals of Armenia and wrote at least one work dedicated to each of them. I took part in the celebrations dedicated to the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Hovhannes Tumanyan, Komitas, Spendiaryan, the 2750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Yerevan, and so on.

There is a big street in Yerevan that, to my great honour, bears my name – Aram Khachaturian Street.

What does Mr Oganessian think: that I got all this for nothing? I was awarded this honour because I gave all my strength and knowledge to Armenia. Therefore, all the nonsense that the bourgeois press writes about me comes either from idleness, or from hostility towards me and their Homeland, of which they have no knowledge and no right to count as their own.

I would like to see how these gentlemen help their Homeland and what [the nature of] this help is? Armenia is one of the Union Republics, sunny, joyful, and under construction.

Armenia is a nation with an ancient civilization and culture. What are these gentlemen doing to help it? Nothing... They just shout: Ah Armenia, homeland, *Hayrenik!*

An Armenian today is someone who benefits his homeland. Whoever does not do this is not an Armenian. Don't let them clamber over Armenians. We do not recognize such Armenians and expel them from our midst.

This rag [*gazetenka*], apparently out of sheer idleness, jeers at me yet still dares to print my portrait. I have absolutely no need for this. I am already known for my music. The whole world knows that I am Armenian. Instead of such ridicule, it would be better to write about Armenia, how it is being built, how it is flourishing in the family of the Union Republics, of the extremely advanced musical culture there, which has already entered the world stage. Our musicians are widely known across the world. The Armenian composers' tour abroad has just ended. The most talented composer Arno Babajanian is now touring the USA.

I react with anger to this article, simply because it is completely wrong and unfounded. This defamation has unfortunately stirred up admirers of my music, and I can only hope that it has not turned them against me. I suggest that the newspaper write the truth about me and that it retracts the nonsense that it wrote. In conclusion, I want to say that I have been living in Moscow for fifty-two years, that I have received a great deal from the Russian people, and that I studied at a conservatoire here and in Russian schools. I attribute the fact that I became a composer not only to my nation [*narod*], but also to Moscow and my Russian teachers.

BUT I AM AN ARMENIAN. I HAVE BEEN, AM, AND WILL ALWAYS BE AN ARMENIAN, AND MY CREATIVE ACTIVITIES BELONG FOREMOST TO MY NATIVE PEOPLE AND HOMELAND – SOVIET ARMENIA.<sup>4</sup>

Aram Khachaturian.

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<sup>4</sup> Only the *Pis'ma* version has this paragraph entirely in capitals.

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RGALI, Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy arkhiv literaturï i iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art), Moscow.

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