

Rhapsody in Red:  
Jazz and a Soviet Public Sphere  
Under Stalin  
By  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes the public sphere that coalesced in the Soviet jazz scene during Josef Stalin's reign. Scholars debate the extent to which Soviet citizens, especially under Stalin, were coerced into cooperating with the regime through terror; willingly cooperated with the regime out of self-interest; or re-aligned their speech, behavior, and thoughts to conform to Bolshevik ideology and discourse. In all cases, citizens were generally unable to openly express their own opinions on what Soviet society should look like. In this dissertation, I attempt to bridge this gap by analyzing the diverse reactions to jazz music in Josef Stalin's Soviet Union. I argue that audience engagement with jazz and discussions about the genre in the Soviet press and elsewhere were attempts to grapple with bigger questions of public concern about leisure, morality, ethnicity, cosmopolitanism and patriotism in a socialist society. This jazz public sphere was suppressed in the late 1940s and early 1950s because of Cold War paranoia and fears of foreign influences in Soviet life. In its place, a counterpublic sphere formed, in which jazz enthusiasts expressed views on socialism that were more open and contradictory to official norms. This counterpublic sphere foreshadowed aspects of post-Stalinist Soviet culture. To support my arguments, I employ archival documents such as fan mail and censorship records, periodicals, memoirs, and Stalin-era jazz recordings to determine the themes present in jazz music, how audiences reacted to them, and how these popular reactions overlapped with those of journalists, musicologists, bureaucrats, and composers. This project expands our understanding of when and where public spheres can form, challenges top-down interpretations of Soviet cultural policy, and illuminates the Soviet Union and Russia's ambivalent relationship with the West and its culture.

In loving memory of  
John Christian Beresford  
Matthew 5:8

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## INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 1917, the New York-based Victrola Talking Machine Company released a 78-rpm recording of “Livery Stable Blues” by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, the first jazz record ever produced and sold. It heralded an age in which a revolutionary new musical form – one that originated in the United States’ oppressed black minority – would provide the soundtrack to decades of American and world culture. The next day, on International Women’s Day, female workers in Petrograd went on strike, demanding bread, and were soon joined by thousands of other workers and soldiers in the Russian capital. Within a week, the tsarist regime collapsed and Russia plunged into a year of revolutionary activity that culminated in the ascendancy of the Bolshevik Party. This dissertation explores the relationship between these two revolutionary forces: jazz and Bolshevism.

In the century since it was first marketed to mass audiences, jazz has proved to be a remarkably adaptable art form. Jazz first emerged in the black communities of major American cities like New Orleans, Kansas City, and New York and melded African American culture with European instrumentation and musical theory. In the hundred years since “Livery Stable Blues” was released, musicians and songwriters around the world have adapted jazz to make it intelligible to almost any global culture and musical tradition – whether in Nigeria, India, Finland, or Argentina. In this dissertation, I analyze the ways in which musicians, audiences, and party-state bureaucrats sought to adapt jazz to Soviet culture during the 1930s and 1940s and make it a musical form that was compatible with the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. In doing so, I argue that the Soviet jazz



scene under Josef Stalin, and the leisure sphere of which it was a part, constituted a public sphere in which people of diverse backgrounds, including musicians, critics, party-state bureaucrats, and mass audiences confronted the questions of what Soviet culture should look and sound like.

This research integrates the Soviet Union into the global story of the encounter with modernization during the interwar period. While the Soviet Union experienced modernization and, relatedly, jazz music at roughly the same time as many other parts of the world, the particularities of Soviet society contributed to the unique “inflections” in the development of Soviet modernity and the quest for an “authentic” form of jazz music, a process that scholars refer to as “co-eval” modernity. The most powerful inflections stemmed from the statist nature of Soviet society and the overwhelming power that Bolshevik ideology held over party-state leaders as well as citizens. Although the Soviet party-state and Bolshevik ideology wielded enormous power, one area where Soviet citizens could exercise considerable control and choice was in cultural consumerism, especially leisure culture. Leisure culture provided an arena in which people could express diverse worldviews and desires and performing, listening to, or dancing to jazz proved to be particularly controversial leisure activities. The Soviet jazz scene thus became a public sphere itself, allowing a wide range of individuals to participate in a nationwide conversation about the nature of Soviet society and culture.

Jazz’s global spread between the two world wars, and reactions to this spread, cannot be fully understood without appreciating the global spread of early 20<sup>th</sup> century modernization. During the 1920s and 1930s, improvements in mass transportation and mass communication collapsed space and time, thus allowing people across broad

geographical areas to share experiences simultaneously. Although many of these technologies, like automobiles, airplanes, and cinemas existed prior to World War One, it was during the interwar period that they became broadly accessible to mass audiences and, consequently, part of popular culture. It is no surprise, for example, that Charlie Chaplin rocketed to worldwide fame during this period, despite spending most of his time in Southern California. Audiences around the globe could share the experience of watching and enjoying Chaplin's films because of the spread of cinema and movie houses in the 1920s.

These new technologies were not the only facets of modernization that people encountered during the interwar period. Improvements in transportation and communication allowed for increased mobility and the ability to transmit information more rapidly, which in turn increased interaction between different peoples and cultures. In Europe, for example, the war brought colonial subjects into intimate contact with citizens of the imperial powers in the trenches and, after the war, many colonial subjects decided to remain in the "mother" country rather than return home. The war also proved to many citizens that the "civilized" norms of behavior and sociability that existed before 1914 were morally bankrupt, having contributed to the carnage of the war, and were inadequate for dealing with the realities of postwar life. Therefore, modernization brought about new ways of acting and being that were decidedly different from pre-war standards. The interwar period also witnessed the rise of mass populations as the locus of social, political, and cultural activity. Although all these trends had existed prior to the outbreak of war, their spread accelerated in the years afterward, both within Europe and North America and elsewhere.

The spread of modernization and its trappings after 1918 made jazz's global proliferation possible. Trains and steamships carried (African) American jazz musicians across the Atlantic and the Pacific and they brought jazz to world cities like Paris, Osaka, Havana, and Johannesburg. Recordings of jazz music also spread around the globe as they were transported by individual travelers, sold by American recording companies who established branch offices in major international cities like Shanghai, or over the radio airwaves.<sup>1</sup> Engaging with jazz music also meant, particularly in the early years of its spread, engaging with American and African American culture (and cultural power) for the first time. Furthermore, jazz became associated with new forms of behavior and sociability, especially new forms of dancing, that contrasted starkly with those of the pre-war era. Jazz, therefore, provided the soundtrack to modernity during the interwar period. No wonder, then, that many people refer to this period by the shorthand "The Jazz Age."

The encounter with jazz in the former Russian Empire was, in many ways, similar to encounters elsewhere in the world. Jazz first arrived thanks to the increased mobility and interactions of Russians and Americans. According to Edwin Ware Hullinger, American college students, volunteering with the American Relief Administration during the famine of 1921, introduced Russians to jazz through the jazz records they brought with them.<sup>2</sup> Others argue that it was Russians themselves, not foreigners, who first brought jazz to Russia. The avant-garde author and dancer Valentin Parnakh first saw jazz performed in Paris and Berlin in 1921 and was so taken by jazz as an avant-garde art

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew F. Jones, "Black Internationale: Notes on the Chinese Jazz Age," in *Jazz Planet*, ed. by E. Taylor Atkins (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Ware Hullinger, *The Reforging of Russia*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1925), 319.

form that he returned to Russia to organize the first jazz concert in Moscow in October 1922.<sup>3</sup> Others argue that jazz came from multiple directions. Valeriia Dorokhova, who was a child in Novosibirsk in the 1920s, recalled that jazz reached Siberia from Vladivostok in the east far earlier than it did from Moscow in the West (likely the result of the American Expeditionary Force occupying Vladivostok during the Russian Civil War).<sup>4</sup> Regardless, it is safe to conclude that jazz arrived in Russia sometime between 1920 and 1922 and that both foreigners and Russians themselves are responsible for its introduction.

It was not until the 1930s, after Stalin enacted a massive modernization program across Soviet territory that jazz truly flourished there. Although jazz appeared in some of the larger Soviet cities during the years of the New Economic Policy (1922-1926), and although African American jazz troupes like Sam Wooding's *Chocolate Kiddies* and Benny Peyton's Jazz Kings caused sensations in Moscow and Leningrad in 1926, jazz did not spread widely during this period. However, when the Stalinist regime ramped up its production of gramophones and records, expanded the country's infrastructure of radio stations and cinema houses (all new forms of mass communication), and encouraged Soviet citizens to enjoy their free time through dancing and other forms of sociability, jazz became a nationwide phenomenon. By the eve of the Second World War, jazz was broadly popular from Kiev and Odessa in the West to Vladivostok and Khabarovsk in the Far East and jazz artists were some of the Soviet Union's most well-known personalities.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 43, 46. Indeed, Soviet jazz remained something of an avant-garde affair during the 1920s.

<sup>4</sup> S.A. Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi, ili ocherki istorii dzhaza v Novosibirske, 1928-2005 gg.* (Novosibirsk: Sib. univ. izd-vo, 2005), 16.

Although many parts of the world, including the Soviet Union, encountered jazz and modernization throughout this period, the experience was not uniform. Harry Harootunian argues that, although different regions experienced the same phenomena simultaneously, they did not react to it in the same way. The history, socio-political structures, and other specifics of a given locale impacted how people and governments engaged with and reacted to modernization. These conditions caused “inflections” in the way that modernity developed in these areas and helps to integrate diverse parts of the globe, while recognizing the diverse paths of development that countries like Japan and Great Britain took during the interwar period. Therefore, different parts of the globe may be considered to experience a “shared” modernity, but the ways each region reacts to it are manifestly different. Harootunian defines this interpretation of modernity as “co-eval” modernity.<sup>5</sup> I argue that the globalization of jazz can be understood through this lens of co-eval modernity.

As with modernity, encounters with jazz, whether in Asia, Africa, the Americas, or Europe, shared some similarities. Many of the dances associated with jazz like the Charleston, foxtrot, and the quickstep were common in dance halls around the world. Some songs became part of a global vocabulary of jazz and were instantly recognizable to jazz enthusiasts whether in the United States or elsewhere. Many of the criticisms of jazz were uniform across regions too. As E. Taylor Atkins summarizes:

...critics of every conceivable political persuasion, from Ireland to Japan, China to the Netherlands...were simply horrified by jazz’s significance and omnipresence. Whereas...in Africa jazz could become an emblem of racial pride, in other parts of the world its black pedigree was cause for alarm. Its proliferation among the decadent bourgeoisie in North America, East Asia, and Western

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), xvi-xvii.

Europe made it detestable to leftist and rightist critics alike. Some attributed jazz's powers to Pavlovian responses, such as uncontrollable libidinal surges or suspension of rational thought. Others feared that jazz portended no less than the extinction of recently crafted and thus fragile notions of national self, as fashioned by fascist regimes and anti-colonial movements.<sup>6</sup>

While many aspects of the encounter with jazz were similar across geographic regions, the trajectory of this encounter was also highly varied. Because it was so closely associated with modernity, jazz highlighted and exacerbated tensions within society that had emerged in the wake of encounters with modernity. Consequently, jazz became, according to Atkins, “a site of contestation where competing aesthetic and social values, definitions of modernity and of self, and standards of artistic originality vied.”<sup>7</sup> The particularities of a given society impacted the nature of this contestation as well as its outcomes.

One of the most common debates that highlights the “co-evalness” of the global encounter with jazz is the struggle over authenticity. According to Atkins, authenticity in jazz is defined by adherence to aesthetic standards that are established by artists whose background, experiences, and artistic vision bestow upon them the status of “original” artists.<sup>8</sup> Since jazz originated in the United States, and since American jazz musicians were considered the “original” elite of the genre, jazz enthusiasts in the United States and elsewhere assumed that to play “authentic” jazz meant closely adhering to the repertoire

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<sup>6</sup> E. Taylor Atkins, “Towards a Global History of Jazz” in *Jazz Planet*, ed. by E. Taylor Atkins (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), xv-xvi.

<sup>7</sup> E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>8</sup> E. Taylor Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, 24.

and style of artists like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, or Louis Armstrong. On the other hand, jazz artists, especially in non-American contexts must frequently maintain a sense of authenticity rooted in their own native culture as well. To strive for one form of authenticity inevitably negates the other.<sup>9</sup> The challenge, then, was whether it was better to play “authentic” jazz or “authentically German,” “Australian,” or “Swedish” jazz.

While all regions struggled with the question of authenticity in jazz, the particularities of each society made the debates about authenticity and their outcomes unique. In France, for example, jazz-skeptics worried that the arrival and popularity of jazz signaled that France had been eclipsed by the United States as the world’s cultural epicenter.<sup>10</sup> Only when a new generation of French jazz musicians emerged and fused jazz with existing French musical traditions did French listeners embrace jazz more broadly.<sup>11</sup> In South Africa, non-whites debated whether it was better for jazz musicians to perform in the American-European style, thus proving to white audiences that they were “civilized,” or integrate indigenous themes and rhythms as a statement of African political and cultural consciousness and self-identity.<sup>12</sup> In Japan, some intellectuals argued that, by embracing jazz, Japanese musicians and audiences were both reinforcing

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<sup>9</sup> Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, 25-29.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 127-133.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Ballantine, “Music and Emancipation: The Social Role of Black Jazz and Vaudeville in South Africa Between the 1920s and the Early 1940s,” in *Jazz Planet*, ed. by E. Taylor Atkins (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 169-189.

Japan's "colonial" relationship with the United States at the expense of Japanese colonial ambitions, and abandoning Japan's "essential" culture and traditions.<sup>13</sup>

Soviet musicians, critics, and audiences also grappled with the question of "authenticity" in jazz and, as in other parts of the world, this debate was structured by the specifics of Soviet life. Like Japan, Russia had a long history of ambivalence towards the West, admiring and imitating the West while also differentiating itself from it. The Soviet Union shared this ambivalence. On the one hand, the West had spawned industrialization, urbanization, and Marxism—that most modern of ideologies, as well as principles of science and reason. However, the West had also birthed capitalism and imperialism, both of which were firmly ensconced across Europe and North America at the time. So, if Soviet musicians played jazz were they embracing modernist or bourgeois values? Were jazz musicians meant to adhere to the stylistic standards set by American jazz musicians or was it better to prove the superiority of Soviet culture by making jazz something authentically Soviet? The different answers that jazz musicians, critics, audiences, and bureaucrats came up with for these questions betrayed diverse attitudes towards the West and the extent to which the Soviet Union should embrace western-style modernity.

As in other parts of the world, Soviet audiences had to confront jazz's origins in the United States and what this meant for Soviet society. Were jazz musicians meant to adhere to the stylistic standards set by American jazz musicians or was it better to adapt jazz to one's own geographical and cultural context? Could such music still be considered "jazz?" Yet, for the Soviet Union, this struggle for authenticity took a

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<sup>13</sup> Atkins, *Blue Nippon*, 28-29.



different path. There was never a question of whether to blatantly imitate Western jazz musicians. It was assumed *a priori* that Soviet culture, since it was socialist, was superior to its Western counterparts. To have merely imitated Western jazz was insufficient, Soviet jazz had to be better, but the question of what “better” meant was unclear. To the extent that Soviet jazz should imitate Western jazz, some musicians and enthusiasts argued, it should emulate “negro” jazz as it existed before capitalist forces corrupted it. Others argued that if Soviet jazz was going to prove its superiority to Western jazz, it had to incorporate symphonic and classical music because this was the highest, most cultured form of music there was. Yet another argument was that, since western jazz was based on African American folk idioms, “authentically Soviet” jazz should be based upon the folk idioms of the Soviet Union’s many nationalities.

The major factors that influenced the “inflections” of the Soviet encounter with jazz were the statist nature of Soviet society and the supremacy of the Bolshevik ideology that the state espoused. Under Josef Stalin, the Soviet Union became one of the preeminent examples of a statist society. After a brief flirtation with limited capitalism and private property ownership under the New Economic Policy (NEP), the Soviet economy and society came under increasing state control. Restaurants, record companies, and other industries connected to jazz music were managed by state bureaucrats rather than entrepreneurs. What is more, while jazz artists and music in the capitalist world were managed by a plethora of media companies and public relations firms, the Soviet jazz industry was managed by the state organizations responsible for culture (the Commissariat for Enlightenment and its successor, the Committee on Arts Affairs, the All-Union Radio Committee, etc.) and was subject to the Soviet censorship regime,

which ensured that nothing culturally or politically “inappropriate” would reach the eyes and ears of mass audiences. The Soviet state was, therefore, more heavily involved than most states in the promotion and management of the Soviet encounter with jazz, alongside other aspects of modernity.

The nature of the Soviet state’s role in governing everyday life is the subject of considerable historical debate. Beginning in the 1950s, historians framed the Soviet Union as a society almost totally governed “from above” through a state-run campaign of intimidation and terror. By the 1970s and 1980s a new generation of historians, while not discounting the horrors of Stalin’s terror, argued that his success hinged on the cooperation of a broad range of actors, many of whom were motivated more by personal interest than by ideological fervor or fear. In the cultural sphere, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that, far from being victims of Stalin’s policies, the Soviet cultural intelligentsia, some of whom were holdovers from the pre-revolutionary era, willingly collaborated with the Stalinist regime because they were given a great deal of autonomy in their work. Fitzpatrick notes that prominent cultural figures such as Maxim Gorky and theater director Konstantin Stanislavskii, enjoyed considerable leeway in formulating Soviet cultural policy within their domains and, as long as they paid some lip service to Marxist-Leninism, they were essentially allowed to work as they pleased. Even in the relatively brief period of cultural revolution (1928-1932), when the traditional cultural intelligentsia was attacked, organizations like the Russian Association of Proletarian

Writers (RAPP) and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) were not created by the party, but by radical activists within Soviet cultural circles.<sup>14</sup>

Other historians similarly argue that Soviet culture resulted from negotiation rather than decree. In her study of post-war literature, Vera Dunham similarly argues that the Soviet leadership struck a “Big Deal” with the country’s managerial/professional “middle” class. The Stalinist regime agreed to embrace the values and practices of this middle class, which included materialism, careerism, and the desire to live “the good life” in exchange for this class’s loyalty and help in rebuilding the country after the war. Although Dunham’s own research is focused on post-war Stalinism, she argues that the “Big Deal” was only the latest of a string of deals that the Soviet regime struck with certain sectors of society, having struck similar bargains with the intelligentsia in the 1920s and with the working class in the 1930s.<sup>15</sup>

None of this should overshadow the violence that the Stalinist state could and did unleash on its citizens. In 1933 alone, some six million people died due to the famine that resulted from the forced collectivization of agriculture in Ukraine, Russia, and Kazakhstan. The suppressed Soviet census of 1937 showed that, largely because of state terror, Soviet population growth lagged or even declined during the early 1930s and that more than a million individuals languished in Soviet prisons, special settlements and labor camps.<sup>16</sup> As Chapter 5 of this dissertation illustrates, jazz musicians were not

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<sup>14</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Cultural Orthodoxies Under Stalin,” in *The Cultural Front*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 238-256.

<sup>15</sup> Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 4-14.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Schlögel, *Moscow, 1937* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 109-124.

immune to the state's repressive activities and, in the late 1940s, they became targets of the Stalinist regime's wrath.

These historical interpretations of Soviet power as totalitarian versus negotiated are complicated by recent work on the second key difference to how jazz and modernity were experienced in the Soviet Union compared to other parts of the globe: Bolshevik ideology. The Soviet leadership did not exercise power for power's sake, but because they ardently believed in Bolshevism and sought to put its principles into practice. Bolshevism fused revolutionary Marxism with the Russian intelligentsia's historical belief in human malleability and the possibility of radical self-transformation. The ultimate goal of Bolshevism was that all people should reach a stage of "consciousness," which Jochen Hellbeck argues was meant to "[spur] the individual to think and act on behalf of the oppressed masses and thus [create] an enlarged sense of individual self, filled with purpose, significance, and moral value."<sup>17</sup> This principle guided the actions of the early Bolsheviks both before and after 1917 and once in power, they set about educating people under their governance, training them and encouraging them to carry out this process of self-transformation. The end product of this self-transformation was the New Soviet Person, who melded consciousness with revolutionary initiative and who would usher in the new socialist age. In the end, Bolshevik ideology became so powerful and so pervasive that it became impossible for the vast majority of Soviet citizens to understand or experience anything outside it.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, it did not matter whether the

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<sup>17</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 198-237.

state monopolized power or shared it with specific groups within Soviet society – true power was held by the ideology itself.

While the primary arena where self-transformation occurred was supposed to be the workplace, culture was meant to play an important role as well. If labor forged a sense of class consciousness and inculcated “socialist attitudes” towards work, culture could complement this by encouraging Soviet citizens to give up “petty-bourgeois” or peasant habits like drunkenness, poor hygiene, and brawling in favor of a new Soviet habits—a way of thinking, behaving, and being that was influenced by and reinforced Bolshevik ideology. They referred to this new habitus as “culturedness” (*kul’turnost’*).<sup>19</sup> The Bolshevik leadership encouraged norms of behavior that ranged from “socialist” consumerism and personal hygiene to habits of speech and even interior decorating. Those who manifested these norms of behavior were said to have achieved culturedness.<sup>20</sup>

The problem was that, as David Hoffman notes, Marx never wrote at great length about what culture under communism was supposed to look like.<sup>21</sup> This philosophical and ideological void was filled with discussions and debates among Soviet officials and intellectuals about what Soviet culture should be. Some individuals, especially members

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<sup>19</sup> On the role of work as a path towards self-transformation, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 201-215. There are several historians who have addressed the topics of acculturation and *kul’turnost’* under Stalin. See, for example, David Hoffman, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Vadim Volkov, “The concept of *kul’turnost’*: notes on the Stalinist civilizing process,” and Julie Hessler “Cultured trade: the Stalinist turn towards consumerism,” both in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Volkov, “The concept of *kul’turnost’*”, 216-225; Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 17-26.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 4.

of the artistic avant-garde, argued that since the revolution had brought about a new, futuristic age, culture should accentuate this revolutionary newness. Others like Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky argued that because Russia's government worked on behalf of workers and peasants, it should expose these groups to the best aspects of Russian culture that had been withheld from them, like operas and art museums. Still other groups like the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers believed that any cultural production must be imbued with a proletarian mindset if it was to have any utility in Soviet society. It was in the context of this tension between "traditionalists" and the avant-gardist and proletarian champions of "modern" culture that jazz emerged in Soviet society.

In this dissertation, I argue that this void contributed to the emergence of a public sphere under Stalin, which manifested in Soviet leisure culture. Jürgen Habermas famously defines the public sphere as:

"the sphere of private people come together [sic] as a public...to engage...in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor."<sup>22</sup>

It was through such rational debate and critique that the public could establish a consensus regarding these issues of general concern (which Habermas labels "public opinion") that might be wielded against the state. Such a public sphere relies upon freedom of association and press in order to function properly. These freedoms did not exist in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 27.

Although Habermas was interested only in the “bourgeois” public sphere that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, his model has been the standard by which other societies are measured. Zbigniew Brzezinski and Carl Friedrich argue that the absence of the Habermasian public sphere via a state monopoly over mass media is the hallmark of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, including the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in his exhaustive analysis of the major Soviet newspapers under Stalin, Jeffrey Brooks argues that Soviet newspapers, “contextualized the Soviet experience and imposed a structure on thinking,” but did little to solicit anything but the most laudatory public comments for publication. Any sort of dialogue about issues of the day was confined, in Brooks’s words, to “private sitting rooms and at kitchen tables.”<sup>24</sup>

In recent years, other scholars have challenged the normalization of the Habermasian public spheres and argued that they are far more elastic than previous argued. One way of understanding public spheres that sidesteps the necessity of free press and assembly is through the lens of consumerism. Michael Warner, for example, argues that citizens who cannot access or exercise other forms of public expression may turn to social actions outside the Habermasian public sphere to articulate their world views and desires. Commodity consumption is a particularly powerful means of accomplishing this. Warner refers to this public of consumers as a “mass public” and suggests that such a public is more elastic and relatable than the traditional rational-critical public sphere.<sup>25</sup> I

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<sup>23</sup> Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), xiv.

<sup>25</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 168-170.

argue that such a “mass public” may be found in Stalinist leisure culture and is particularly visible in the Soviet jazz scene.

At first glance, it appears that even this form of consumerism-as-public sphere was not possible in the Soviet Union since there so few commodities to consume. However, Soviet citizens had a considerable degree of choice in the kinds of leisure they consumed. Soviet citizens were offered an array of cultural products or activities to consume or participate in. If a person liked chess, they could join a chess club. If they did not like chess, they could walk in the park or go see a movie. In the music sphere alone, citizens could choose to see or listen to operas, symphonic music, gypsy romances, folk performances, and many other genres, including jazz. If they so desired, Soviet citizens could choose to do *nothing* in their free time, a stark contrast to work, which was compulsory. In this way, Soviet leisure became a public sphere in which citizens could express and articulate their thoughts and desires through the activities they engaged in. Those who engaged in the Soviet jazz community (or railed against it) expressed various perspectives on what they thought the Soviet Union looked and sounded like and, therefore, created several smaller public spheres within the larger leisure public sphere.

Although consumerist practices played an important role in the jazz public sphere, the Soviet press, especially cultural newspapers like *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (*Soviet Art*), acted as a conduit for positive and negative depictions of jazz music. Brooks argues that Soviet newspapers during the Stalin period performed a primarily performative role, not so much persuading readers, but telling them how to think about the regime’s policies.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, xv-xvi.



This interpretation is less applicable to the cultural press, since there was no clear consensus even among the Soviet leadership about what people should think about culture, much less about jazz. Readers could find a diatribe against jazz in one issue of a newspaper, and in the next, they would find a rapturous review of a recent jazz concert. In November and December of 1936, numerous articles attacking jazz appeared in official state newspaper *Izvestiia*, while an equal number defending jazz appeared in the official party newspaper *Pravda*. Only in the postwar years, when Soviet policy turned unambiguously against jazz, did the Soviet cultural press develop a single, unified voice.

The jazz scene under Stalin provides a particularly useful example of leisure-as-public-sphere because it was both admired and despised in equal portions. For all the arguments that jazz was uncultured and bourgeois, there were also arguments that it was highly cultured and socialist. Although Soviet cultural leaders promoted other forms of leisure and music at jazz's expense, citizens chose to consume jazz in concerts, records, and radio broadcasts. These differences of opinion were not defined by class origin or status within the Soviet political and social hierarchies, but by differences of taste. Those who disliked jazz, whether workers, musicologists, or Politburo members, expressed a certain array of tastes while those workers, musicologists, and Politburo members who did like jazz expressed another. In this sense, the leisure public sphere, and jazz specifically, became a social leveler.

Where possible, I specifically avoid referring to *the* public sphere, because it is almost impossible to identify a Soviet public that encompassed all people living within Soviet territory. Indeed, one could argue that a myriad number of publics formed and dissolved over the life of the Soviet Union, but I focus on the public sphere that

organized around jazz music. This public sphere consisted of figures within the Soviet entertainment industry, including songwriters, lyricists, musicians, and bureaucrats. It also included the journalists, musicologists, and others who wrote articles, books, and pamphlets that attacked, defended, or described jazz music. Finally, this public included jazz's audience: anyone who heard or engaged with jazz music in the Soviet Union whether in-person, over the radio, or on gramophone records. This public existed primarily in cities, especially Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Odessa, and Novosibirsk, though it could also be found in rural communities as well.

Finally, it is important to remember that the Soviet jazz public sphere was a limited public sphere. The vast majority of those who participated in it lacked significant political power and if and when the Soviet leadership decided that jazz was unacceptable, there was little that the genre's supporters could do to affect policy regarding the matter. Participants in the jazz public sphere also had unequal access to media outlets and there was no Soviet equivalent to *Downbeat* magazine that might manifest a print version of the jazz public sphere. Considering these limitations, most citizens in this public sphere expressed their views by turning on the radio, buying records or tickets to concerts, composing or performing jazz songs, or, for those who had access, writing newspaper articles or public speeches that praised or denigrated jazz music and culture. This limited public sphere is, therefore, reminiscent of the mass public sphere outlined by Warner.

In the first chapter I analyze the cultural context in which the jazz public sphere formed, namely the rapidly expanding leisure culture that emerged during the 1930s and its role in the campaign to forge the "New Soviet Person." Leisure played an important

role in the creation of the New Soviet Person and many bureaucrats, musicians, and audience members saw jazz as a major asset in this process. Jazz bands performed in leisure venues ranging from cafes and restaurants, to cinemas and even in parks and resorts. Jazz music was also disseminated through the mass technologies associated with leisure, particularly radio and the phonograph. While the above figures welcomed jazz in Soviet leisure, many Bolshevik moralists interpreted jazz as a hindrance to social transformation and made their opinions known in the Soviet press. These competing perspectives indicate that diverse figures in Stalinist society engaged in an intense public debate regarding the question of how Soviet citizens were meant to behave and spend their non-working hours.

In Chapter Two I build upon jazz's role in Soviet mass leisure by analyzing the role of celebrity in the Soviet jazz public sphere and the question of what an ideal Soviet citizen looked like. To do this, I focus on the greatest jazz star of the Stalin period and one of the most popular public figures after Stalin himself, Leonid Utesov. I trace Utesov's rise to fame and compare him with the pantheon of Soviet hero-celebrities of the Stalin period such as aviators and polar explorers, to argue that, unlike these figures, Utesov's fame relied more upon mass popularity than on state patronage (though he did benefit from some state support). I then analyze Utesov's fan mail from this period and argue that his many fans ascribed their own ideas of what the ideal citizen looked like onto his personal persona, which differed from the image of hero-celebrities, whom the Stalinist leadership actively elevated and associated themselves with. Utesov's celebrity status, therefore, is evidence of consensus within the jazz public sphere and its influence on Soviet culture.

Chapter Three delves into the ways that the jazz public sphere grappled with the interrelated issues of internationalism, nationalism, and the Soviet relationship with the West. One of the main reasons why Soviet critics objected to jazz was because of its origins in western bourgeois society and culture. Another common critique, especially from classically trained composers and musicologists, was that jazz was inherently unmusical. Jazz's defenders countered these objections by emphasizing jazz's relationship to African-American culture and argued that Soviet jazz was an expression of proletarian internationalism and solidarity with an oppressed population. Others conceded that jazz was a low-class western art form, but, if Soviet jazz groups incorporated the best aspects of the western musical tradition, by which they meant symphonic music, they could elevate its cultural sophistication and make it into the best possible version of jazz, infinitely superior to its western (bourgeois) counterparts. Still others believed that the best path forward for Soviet jazz was to abandon the genre's western connotations entirely and weave it into the musical culture of the Soviet Union's many ethnic groups. These defenses, coupled with the array of songs that jazz artists performed, indicate that the jazz public sphere provided a space to determine how the Soviet Union should relate to the rest of the world and to its own citizens.

Chapter Four explores the role that the jazz public sphere played in mobilizing Soviet citizens to fight against Nazi Germany and its allies during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). In this chapter I argue that the Soviet jazz public sphere facilitated a dialogue between artists and audiences about the definitions of patriotism and homeland. Soviet wartime jazz artists offered audiences a range of songs that depicted different interpretations of patriotism, some of which were rooted in Russian nationalism, others in

geographically specific locales, and still others in the personal relationships that soldiers had with their loved ones and their comrades. By analyzing song lyrics and popular reactions to these songs, I posit that a limited “marketplace of ideas” existed within wartime jazz and that although wartime jazz was a form of propaganda, it constituted a conversation between artists and audiences (mediated by the state, of course). During the war, the Soviet jazz scene provided a place for audiences to determine for themselves what was so “patriotic” about the Great Patriotic War.

Chapter Five details the decline of the jazz public sphere as a result of the official campaigns against western cultural influences and “cosmopolitanism” in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In this chapter, I highlight the ways that artists and audiences continued to engage with the genre and argue that, during this period, the jazz public sphere transformed into what Warner refers to as a “counterpublic.” In this counterpublic, which could be found in private spaces, some public venues, and the Gulag, jazz artists and fans promoted an understanding of Soviet identity that was more elastic and expansive than the dominant “official” interpretations. It also exhibited characteristics akin to what Aleksei Yurchak argues were central to late Soviet culture, especially a prototype of “suspended” life both inside and outside Soviet discourse, which Yurchak refers to as living *vnye*. In this sense, the Soviet jazz scene during the last years of Stalin’s reign foreshadowed the transition to post-Stalinism in Soviet everyday life. I begin by analyzing the shift in anti-jazz rhetoric in the postwar Soviet press as well as the actions taken by the party-state to suppress jazz. I then highlight the ways that audiences and musicians continued to engage with jazz in spite of official proscription. I devote specific

attention to the paradox of jazz in the Gulag, where “deviant” citizens were meant to be reformed, but where jazz was more freely played than elsewhere.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Jazz, Leisure, and the New Soviet Person

#### Introduction

Mikhail Bulgakov's satire on 1930s Moscow, *The Master and Margarita*, includes a scene in the restaurant of MASSOLIT, the Moscow writer's organization:

At exactly midnight, something in the first room crashed, followed by ringing, shattering, and thumping sounds. And at once a thin male voice began to shout despairingly to the music, "Hallelujah!" These were the sounds of the renowned Griboyedov jazz ensemble. Sweat-covered faces seemed to light up, the horses painted on the ceiling seemed to come to life, the light in the lamps seemed to grow brighter, and suddenly, as if freed from their chains, both rooms started to dance, with the veranda following suit...

Bathed in sweat, the waiters carried foaming mugs of beer above the dancers' heads, yelling hoarsely and venomously, "Sorry, sir!" Somewhere, orders were being shouted through a megaphone, "One shashlyk! Two zubrovkas! Triple *polonaise!*" The thin voice no longer sang but wailed "Hallelujah!" The crash of the jazz band's bold cymbals was sometimes muffled by the crash the dishes made as the dishwashers sent them down a slide into the kitchen. In a word, hell.<sup>27</sup>

This scene encapsulates one of the key points of friction regarding jazz in Soviet society. On the one hand, jazz had a prominent place in Soviet urban leisure culture during the Stalin period. It was broadly popular and could be found in many of the places where people spent their free time. At the same time, jazz's very prominence in leisure made it a target and, for some, an example of how easily the Soviet experiment could be derailed. It was fun and cultured (after all, who is more cultured than writers?), yet also chaotic and decadent. It was experienced as heavenly ecstasy by some and as despairingly hellish by others.

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<sup>27</sup> Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, (New York: Vintage International, 1996), 49-50.

During the 1930s, the Soviet Union embarked upon a major expansion of its leisure culture. The revolutionary asceticism associated with war communism and also with the years of the First Five-Year Plan was replaced with a desire to enjoy one's free time. As a political movement devoted to ending the exploitation of workers, the Bolsheviks were always aware of the need to balance work with time away from work. If anything, leisure was essential because it gave workers time to recuperate before the next shift. The Bolsheviks were interested in fostering a robust leisure culture in the Soviet Union for other reasons as well – for one, it helped to instill a sense that time could and should be used rationally and effectively. Second and relatedly, it would give workers opportunities to develop and cultivate themselves in ways that work never could – indeed, one might argue that, ironically, for all its emphasis on labor, leisure was more important to the workers' party than work itself. As one historian has noted,

...leisure (*otdykh*) became the subject of much discussion, from the 1930s especially; it was one of several conceptual tools for building Soviet ideals of 'cultured' life. Its prominence in Soviet discourse was guaranteed by its status as the necessary counterweight to work: its primary rationale (as is suggested by the etymology of *otdykh*) was restorative, yet its function was much broader than that. Leisure had a significant part to play in self-cultivation and sociability, and as such was designed to help build Soviet citizens as well as prepare them for their next stint of physical or mental labor.<sup>28</sup>

This self-cultivation through leisure was central to the campaign to transform Soviet citizens into the New Soviet Person. The Bolsheviks believed in the malleability of humanity and that people could be re-formed as new, improved specimens with a heightened sense of Marxist-Leninist consciousness. Cultured leisure, which was meant to supplant traditional (i.e., peasant) recreational activities like drinking, playing cards,

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen Lovell, "Leisure in Russia: 'Free' Time and Its Uses," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 3, 2006, 132.



and brawling, would guide citizens towards culturedness. As a result, leisure venues like restaurants and cafes, cinema houses, parks and sanatoria, among others, proliferated and were identified as places not merely to relax and recuperate, but as venues where the New Soviet Person was cultivated. These spaces were complemented by new technologies of mass communication and mass culture like radios and phonographs that allowed for new modes of cultured leisure in workers' clubs or at home.

While the Bolsheviks never explicitly identified jazz music as a tool in the campaign for culturedness, the genre's popularity made it an integral part of Soviet leisure during the 1930s. Jazz music could be heard not only in traditional venues like theaters, but also in many parks, eateries, cinema foyers, and in clubs or at home on radio and records. Audiences also engaged with jazz through dances like the foxtrot and the tango. Jazz's presence and effect upon Soviet leisure did not sit lightly with some, however. Far from an avenue to culturedness, they saw it as an expression of decadent bourgeois morality, particularly in the way that people danced to jazz music, and as a rejection of traditional musical culture. For these critics, true culturedness could only be fostered if venues such as cinemas, parks, and cafes were paired with folk music or, ideally, symphonic music and without the "tasteless" pastime of dancing. Throughout the decade, they lamented the supposedly detrimental impact that jazz had upon the nascent Soviet habitus. Despite this public and vehement criticism, jazz's popularity and prevalence in Soviet leisure only grew.

The conflicting perspectives on jazz music and its role in Soviet leisure culture show the jazz public sphere in action. Within this sphere, musicians, venue managers, and audiences articulated a belief that jazz could contribute to the building of New Soviet

People. While they rarely explicitly stated this in the Soviet press, they articulated this view as a mass public by organizing and attending concerts, recording and selling jazz records, and broadcasting and listening to jazz on Soviet radio. That they integrated jazz into leisure spaces that were widely regarded as essential to Soviet acculturation indicates they saw jazz as perfectly compatible with Soviet morality. On the other side of the spectrum, cultural and political elites like composers and journalists as well as other members of the public, condemned jazz as un-cultured and a roadblock on the path to socialist utopia.

Some historians of the Stalin period argue that the project to forge the New Soviet Person was a largely uncontested affair. David Hoffman, for example, focuses on the projection of Stalinist ideology through these campaigns in order to better understand what it meant to achieve culturedness and to understand the non-coercive aspects of Soviet power. To the extent that Hoffman posits the system as contested, he does so by pointing out the Soviet system's structural ironies. The drive for rational work habits, for example, was undermined by the Stakhanovite race to overachieve quotas. Similarly, attempts to train Soviet citizens to be conscientious and educated consumers were rendered moot because there was so little that consumers could buy.<sup>29</sup> When historians have analyzed the ways that Soviet citizens interpreted this campaign, it has been to highlight the ways that they sought to align their "subjective" selves to the "objective" reality of Bolshevik ideology.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On work habits, see Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 29-30. On consumerism and shortage, see Hoffman, *Stalinist Values*, 135-145.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Consequently, it is easy to assume that because people were behaving in ways that appeared contrary to Bolshevik ideology, and because critics complained about it for this very reason, the persistence of jazz in Soviet leisure is evidence that Soviet jazz enthusiasts implicitly rejected or, at best, were apathetic toward Bolshevism. In fact, when a participant in the Harvard Interview Project told his interviewer that he went dancing every evening, the interviewer's response was to ask if he had begun to feel conflicted about his political ideals at this time. The participant flatly denied it.<sup>31</sup>

I argue that the popular embrace of jazz culture in Soviet territory was not a rejection of Soviet ideology, but an expression of an alternative definition of Soviet culturedness. Jazz enthusiasts, whom I define as anyone who readily consumed jazz, believed that jazz music, and the leisure practices associated with it, was a “cultured” activity that could contribute to the construction of the New Soviet Person. The popularity of jazz, with or without criticism, suggests a popular understanding of Soviet ideology that was broader and more open than what many cultural ideologues, including musicologists, critics and some ordinary citizens wished. Consequently, the crossroads of jazz and Soviet leisure inspired a larger discussion about what it meant to be Soviet and how Soviet citizens were supposed to behave. To illustrate this point, I will first outline the major leisure venues and technologies with which jazz was connected and how these all were intended to contribute to Soviet acculturation. I will then analyze the criticism of jazz as it relates to these spaces and technologies and articulate how the friction between

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<sup>31</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 360 (interviewer J.O.). Widener Library, Harvard University, 6.

opposing views of jazz and leisure indicates a broad and public debate about Soviet morality and the inculcation of culturedness in Soviet society.

### **Jazz, Leisure, and Acculturation**

One key venue for jazz was the cinema or movie house. Lenin famously labeled film “the most important of all the arts” and it played a central role in Bolshevik propaganda from the civil war onwards. The Bolsheviks particularly saw cinema’s potential as a tool for educating the public because films audiences did not have to be literate, and films could be widely distributed easily and efficiently. While many smaller communities and rural areas relied upon mobile projection services, large and medium sized cities all boasted at least one cinema, with Moscow hosting at least a dozen spread across the city by the late 1920s.<sup>32</sup> Unlike restaurants, which were inaccessible or too expensive for many Soviet consumers during the 1930s, the cinema was a broadly popular and widely used leisure venue and many cinemas became places to hear jazz music.<sup>33</sup>

In the days of silent cinema, musicians were essential as they helped to heighten the on-screen drama. With the arrival of sound cinema in the early 1930s, many Soviet theaters moved their musicians out of the theater itself and into the lobby where they performed either before or after screenings. Jazz bands proved to be a popular choice to

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<sup>32</sup> *Moskva v planakh: Spravochnik-putevoditel'* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Kommunal'nogo Khoziaistvo, 1928), 62-63.

<sup>33</sup> While I acknowledge that jazz was part of the Soviet film industry, and that jazz could be heard on the silver screen, I will not discuss this aspect of jazz’s relationship with film because, with one or two exceptions, it was more commonly associated with cinema foyers than films themselves.

fulfill this task. The back pages of *Vecherniaia Moskva*, Moscow's main daily newspaper, were filled with advertisements not only for the films that the city's movie houses were showing, but also for what band was performing. These ranged from the Hawaiian-style jazz guitarist John Danker (born Ivan Danker) to trumpeter Iakov Skomorovskii to First Moscow Women's Thea-Jazz Ensemble—the only known Stalin-era jazz band to be led by a woman or in which women featured prominently as instrumentalists and not singers.<sup>34</sup> Skomorovskii's contract from 1936 stipulated that the group perform three times per evening and that each performance last at least 45 minutes. The group was not allowed to perform at other venues without the permission of the cinema's director for the duration of its contract, presumably to ensure that ticket demand remained high. Movie houses became homes to several jazz groups across the Soviet Union. The Rostov-based group "Jazz-revue" (*Dzhaz-reviu*) made their home in the "Coliseum" (*Kolizei*) cinema, which could hold up to 1000 people, for much of 1938.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, jazz bands could be found in Novosibirsk's main cinemas with great regularity during the decade.<sup>36</sup> Landing a gig at a cinema house could be lucrative business for jazz orchestras, especially their leaders. At a time when a full professor at the Moscow Conservatory might earn 400 rubles per month, Skomorovskii and his band earned 1500 rubles per night (including a 300 ruble per diem and housing costs), amounting to

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<sup>34</sup> The Russian-born Danker's name change is referenced in Arkadii Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!: Vospominanie starogo utesovtsa*, (Leningrad: Samizdat, 1984), 6. Klavdiia Shul'zhenko co-led an orchestra with her then-husband Vladimir Koralli in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

<sup>35</sup> Ol'ga Anatol'evna Korzhova, *Dzhaz v Rostove-na-Donu 'ot' i 'po'*, (Rostov-na-Donu: Pegas, 2001, 11.

<sup>36</sup> S.A. Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi, ili istorii dzhaza v Novosibirsk: 1928-2005 gg.*, (Novosibirsk: Sibirskoe universitetskoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 23-24.

between 30,000 and 40,000 rubles per month, while performing at the “Shock-Worker” (*Udarnik*) cinema in Moscow.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Boris Renskii’s orchestra reportedly earned a similarly large 35,000 rubles per month during its run at the First State Cinema in 1937.<sup>38</sup>

Restaurants and cafes acted as another important set of venues in the creation of New Soviet People. At the beginning of the decade, restaurants were ostensibly open only to foreigners and required cash payment. Any Soviet patrons were regarded with suspicion by the police. Not that it mattered since most urban residents could not afford to pay restaurant prices anyway.<sup>39</sup> In the middle of the decade, the state attempted to expand the number of restaurants and cafes and to make them into spaces of acculturation. Restaurants, which were required to have table linens and made-to-order meals, were meant to teach workers proper manners and fine dining.<sup>40</sup> Cafes, which were more widespread and more widely used than restaurants, were also important spaces of acculturation. Columnists in *Pravda*, for example, believed that the café should be an “island of leisure”, a space where workers could both relax and, more importantly, improve their political, educational, or cultural consciousness. They wrote that some factories were replacing their more Spartan cafeterias and canteens with cafes because they provided a space where workers could take a break, enjoy a meal or snack, and most

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<sup>37</sup> Estimated salary cited in S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 159. On Skomorovskii’s contract, TsGALI SPb f. 747, op. 1, d. 8, l. 8.

<sup>38</sup> A. Dmitriev, “Pod zvuki dzhaza,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 11, 1937.

<sup>39</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Jukka Gronow, *Caviar with Champagne: Common Luxury and the Ideals of the Good Life in Stalin’s Russia*, (New York: Berg, 2003), 110.

importantly read journals, listen to the odd lecture, or maybe hear a concert (live or on the radio) once in a while.<sup>41</sup>

These eateries became common venues to see and hear jazz bands. When Leonid Utesov and his band came to Moscow in 1933 to film *The Merry Guys*, his band was recruited by Intourist, the state agency responsible for foreign tourism to the USSR, to perform nightly at the Hotel Metropole's restaurant that summer.<sup>42</sup> After the band's return to Leningrad, several of Utesov's musicians broke away to become the house band at the Hotel Astoria and renamed themselves The Astoria Kids.<sup>43</sup> In Novosibirsk, the first instance of a jazz band being paid for its services occurred when a new restaurant opened and Aleksandr Kulik's band was commissioned to perform for a private audience of Bolshevik party dignitaries.<sup>44</sup> As was the case with movie houses, the back pages of *Vecherniaia Moskva* were filled with advertisements for restaurants like the Savoy, the Hotel Prague, and the Metropole, that boasted a variety of jazz bands, most of which started playing between 9 and 11 PM and continuing on until between 3 and 5 in the morning.<sup>45</sup>

Another leisure venue that Soviet authorities championed was the network of public parks "of culture and rest (*otdykh*)" that proliferated not only in major Soviet

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<sup>41</sup> "Ostrov otdykh," *Pravda*, January 7, 1935.; N. Voronov, "Kafe snatnykh liudei," *Pravda*, January 7, 1935.

<sup>42</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi*, 24-25.

<sup>45</sup> See any edition of *Vecherniaia Moskva* from circa 1932 to circa 1936.

cities, but also in the resort communities of the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, where they complemented the restorative programs of the sanatoriums, during the 1930s. These spaces, especially the Central Park of Culture and Rest, which was renamed Gorkii Park later in the decade, were meant to be a microcosm of Soviet acculturation, providing an alternative to degenerate activities like drinking, billiards, and playing cards. Instead, park visitors had access to a wide range of “wholesome” activities like promenading, boat rides, sunbathing, and even, for a period, parachuting.<sup>46</sup> Gorkii Park and its counterparts across the country also boasted outdoor band shells that regularly featured concerts in the summer months.

These parks and band shells played host to jazz orchestras on a regular basis. From May through June 1939, Iakov Skomorovskii played five different parks in Leningrad, including the Kirov Park (Leningrad’s equivalent to Gorkii Park) and the First Five-Year Plan Park.<sup>47</sup> Several jazz groups like that of N.D. Guliaev performed in the parks of resort and sanatorium communities along the Black Sea Coast and in the Caucasus Mountains.<sup>48</sup> Jazz was so synonymous with the parks of the Black Sea resort communities that in the opening montage of the 1936 film *A Girl Hurries to a Rendezvous*, which takes place in a resort, a jazz band, with its telltale banjo, saxophones, and drum set, can be seen playing in a park band shell. Some of these parks also had

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<sup>46</sup> Claire Shaw, “A fairground for ‘building the new man’: Gorky Park as a site of Soviet Acculturation,” *Urban History* 38(2), 2011, 324-344.

<sup>47</sup> TsGALI SPb f. 747, op. 1, d. 11, l. 3.

<sup>48</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4786, l. 5.



small plazas where people could come and learn to dance to the accompaniment of a live orchestra.

Along with these venues (among others), Soviet elites championed new technologies of mass communication as crucial tools in the struggle to formulate the New Soviet Person. Two of the most prominent were radio and the phonograph. Radio had several advantages that spurred Bolshevnik interest in the technology. Sending and receiving information did not require knowledge of Morse code, it could reach multiple locations simultaneously and was infinitely faster than any other form of communication at the time. The Soviet regime sought to disseminate radios as widely as possible – a project it referred to as “radiofication” (*radiofikatsiia*) – and to maximize the effectiveness of radio broadcasting. To this end, Sovnarkom established the All-Union Radio Committee in January 1933. “Given that radio has become incredibly valuable for the economic and political life”, the committee was established to carry out the campaign for radiofication and radio broadcasting. The committee was also responsible for aiding in the production of radio receivers as well as coordinating research on radio technology and broadcasting.<sup>49</sup>

Music was a central component of Soviet radio broadcasting. Between 1932 and 1936, music made up sixty to seventy percent of all central radio broadcasts, whereas political-educational material made up twelve to fourteen percent. While the range of music that could be heard was broad, the vast majority—almost seventy percent in 1936—belonged to the vague “concert” category. Operas, ballets, and operettas

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<sup>49</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 3, d. 1, l. 140.

(including montages of different operettas), the next largest category, made up less than twenty-five percent of musical broadcasts (the remainder were ethnic/folk productions and amateur (*samodeiatel'nyi*) concerts).<sup>50</sup>

According to the Committee, “artistic broadcasting,” including music, was to play a central role in the fight against “bourgeois influences [and] class antagonism...in local broadcasts” as well as “oversimplification [and] vulgarity.” In other words, the music broadcast over Soviet airwaves had to contribute to the building of socialism, helping Soviet listeners gradually raise their level of sophistication with the ultimate goal that they would appreciate classical composers like Beethoven and Wagner.<sup>51</sup> The All-Union Committee resolved to expand the role of music and other cultural programming on Soviet airwaves and encouraged local affiliates to feature a diverse array of music, including “jazz ensembles.”<sup>52</sup> The Committee took its own recommendation seriously enough to form a Radio Committee Jazz Orchestra and first recruited bandleader Aleksandr Varlamov and his orchestra and then pianist/composer/arranger Aleksandr Tsfasman, one of Moscow’s longest-tenured and most popular bandleaders, and his orchestra.

Although the Soviet government made great efforts to expand its radio infrastructure, it is difficult to ascertain when and how frequently listeners could hear jazz. Archival records for Soviet broadcasting schedules date back only to 1942. The only

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<sup>50</sup> Music as a percentage of all radio broadcasts is summarized in GARF f. 6903, op. 3, d. 15, l. 48. Information for 1936 can be found in GARF f. 6903, op. 3, d. 15, ll. 39-40.

<sup>51</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 162-164.

<sup>52</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 2, d. 1, l. 168.

record of what broadcasting schedules might have looked like is the short-lived bulletin *Radio Programs of the All-Union Radio Committee*. The publication was essentially a *TV Guide* for Soviet radio and provided a detailed breakdown of the daily schedules for radio stations broadcasting out of Moscow, Leningrad, Voronezh, and Minsk.

Though the only available issues of *Radio Programs* are all from 1938, some patterns do emerge regarding how and when jazz could be heard on Soviet radio. Firstly, if Soviet jazz fans wanted to hear their favorite jazz artists and songs on the radio, they generally had to wait until late at night to do so. *Radio Programs* did not give detailed descriptions of each program, so it is not clear precisely which programs featured jazz, but there are three types of entries under which jazz *could* potentially be heard: “Light music” concerts, “Music for dancing”, and concerts by specific jazz orchestras. These programs aired, almost invariably, after nine o’clock in the evening. Most often these programs concluded the programming day. Occasionally, a jazz orchestra might put on a live concert earlier in the day – Tsfasman and his orchestra performed a live concert shortly after noon one day in April, 1938 for example – but on the whole jazz on the radio was an affair for long after sundown.<sup>53</sup> Daytime broadcasts were diverse and included programs directed towards specific demographics like schoolchildren and housewives, reports on the Soviet economy, news, and folk or symphonic musical performances. The reasons for this are unclear. It is possible that, because jazz music was a late-night affair in hotels and restaurants, it made sense to follow the same pattern on the radio.

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<sup>53</sup> “Programmy peredach tsentral’nogo radioveshchaniia”, *Radio-programmy vsesoiuznogo radiokomiteta pri Sovnarkome Soiuza SSR*, March 23, 1938.

Bolshevik leaders thought that sound recording and gramophone technology also had great potential to help build the new Soviet habitus. Like radio, records could be disseminated broadly and did not require that audiences be literate, but unlike radio, they could be replayed again and again. Advocates for expanding Soviet phonograph technology argued that it could be used to spread a broad range of materials designed to acculturate the Soviet masses. “On a thin disc,” wrote Mikhail Dolgoplov, “are inscribed the speeches of the boss (*vozhd’*—implying Stalin), a report on agronomy, a lecture, a lesson in English language, an aria from an opera, the best examples of modern and classical music, and popular musical numbers.”<sup>54</sup>

Some cultural elites argued that through this acculturation campaign, Soviet listeners would utilize phonograph technology more effectively than their western counterparts. Writing in 1931, the musicologist and former employee of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (the predecessor to the Committee on Arts Affairs) Evgenii Braudo stated that, in the West, the vast majority of records were meant for “recreational purposes” (*razvlekatel’nogo poriadka*). While Western phonograph listeners were treated to a massive roster of records, their quality would pale in comparison to what the Soviet recording industry could produce. Soviet listeners would have access to political speeches by Lenin, Kalinin and others; and to recordings of the “vocal masters” like opera singers Enrico Caruso, Mattia Battistini, and others. Indeed, while phonograph technology was used in the West to “disseminate petty-bourgeois decadence,” in Soviet hands, the author argued, it was a tool in “the struggle for cultural

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<sup>54</sup> Mikhail Dolgoplov, “Orudie bor’by za kul’turnuiu revoliutsiiu,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, October 28, 1931.

revolution.”<sup>55</sup> Acclaimed *estrada* (light entertainment) performer Nikolai Smirnov-Sokol’skii wrote that, while he was initially skeptical of the phonograph, he was won over when he heard his wife playing a jazz record. He expressed shock that it was a Soviet group and he concluded that if Soviet artists continued to record songs of the same quality and style as Europe, the technology had a future.<sup>56</sup>

To this end, Soviet authorities sought to boost production not only of portable record players, but also of records themselves. In 1933, Sovnarkom recognized the increasing demand for phonographs and resolved to achieve a series of goals. Firstly, the Soviet sought to increase gramophone production from 155,000 units per year to 1.5 million by 1937, and to increase record production from 3 million to 40 million in the same time frame. The resolution also established a committee to develop a broad and diverse catalog of material to be recorded and made available. Such records were to feature “classical and modern music, vocal music – especially folk (*narodnye*) songs, artistic readings, humorous anecdotes, romances, arias, [and] dance music – including folk dances [as performed by state ballets and choir ensembles, not ethnographic recordings].”<sup>57</sup> Depending upon the artist, jazz recordings could potentially fall under several of these categories, but especially modern or dance music.

While it is unclear what percentage of records produced and sold in the Soviet Union during the 1930s were jazz records, they were by no means a rarity. *Russian-*

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<sup>55</sup> Evgenii Braudo, “Ot agrominimuma do urokov frantsuzskogo iazyka”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, October 28, 1931.

<sup>56</sup> N.P. Smirnov-Sokol’skii, “Kakova zapis’?”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 20, 1933.

<sup>57</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 6, ll. 1-2.

*records.com*, a website that maintains a near-comprehensive catalog of records produced in Russia during the twentieth century, boasts an extensive list of jazz records put out by labels like Gramplasttrest and LEF. However, the catalog is diverse and includes not only the major jazz performers such as Leonid Utesov or Aleksandr Tsfasman, but also lesser known groups like the state jazz orchestras of Armenia and Uzbekistan and Soviet pressings of imported jazz recordings by the Berlin-based Weintraub Syncopators (who played in Moscow in 1936), British bandleader Bert Ambrose and American bandleader Paul Whiteman.

While this is not an exhaustive list of the leisure venues and technologies that were recruited to help form the new Soviet habitus, it illustrates how, because of its presence within a variety of forms of cultured leisure, jazz was intimately entwined with efforts to form the New Soviet Person. While the above paragraphs make it appear that jazz was “handed down” to audiences by the state, it is more likely that the state acquiesced to popular taste in this regard. The fact that so many restaurants and cinemas advertised their jazz bands, and that many jazz bands were paid so well for their services, suggests that they could effectively draw audiences. However, simply because the state embraced, or at least turned a blind eye towards jazz, it does not follow that all people accepted jazz’s role in Soviet acculturation. Indeed, for some, jazz was the antithesis of culturedness and its presence, as well as the activities associated with it, challenged some observers’ understanding of what it meant to be cultured. For these critics, the supposed vulgarity of jazz music’s sound, poor quality of jazz musicianship, obscene amounts of money that musicians could earn, or the supposed immorality of jazz dancing all cast a pall over the entire Soviet project.

## **Jazz as Impediment to Culturedness**

Even though jazz was so intimately wrapped up in Soviet leisure, there were many people, both elite and non-elite, who believed the genre had no role to play in building the New Soviet Person. Consequently, despite the spread of jazz in leisure spaces and technologies, the pages of the Soviet press featured numerous attacks on jazz in these venues and suggested that the genre's presence created a crisis in Soviet acculturation. The leaders of these attacks were frequently musicologists, composers, or elite figures within the cultural (especially the musical) sphere, but occasionally workers in other fields contributed their voices. Although none of these figures sat in positions of real power (none of them, for example, worked for the Committee on Arts Affairs), many of them carried the cache of being authorities on Soviet culture, both what it was and what it should be. Their view of "culturedness" was more austere and puritanical and while few argued that venues and practices like cinemas, cafes, and phonographs lacked value, jazz's presence undermined their potential. The best way to engage with these cultural practices, they argued, was through bowdlerized forms of folk culture and, preferably, the classical canon of symphonic music.

In the case of cinema, critics derided the jazz played in theater foyers for a variety of reasons. Firstly, they objected to the supposedly inappropriate music that these groups played. Iurii Motylev, writing in the Committee on Arts Affairs newspaper *Muzyka*, railed against the music that L.M. Kunin's jazz orchestra played at the "Central" (*Tsentral'nyi*) cinema in Moscow. The group's music, Motylev stated, was "monotonous and uninteresting" and filled with "vulgarity." He particularly pointed to select songs by

Soviet songwriters that lacked any pretense towards the spirit of “high optimism” that accompanied the supposed achievement of socialism and literary quality. One song from Kunin’s repertoire includes the stanza:

Of sadness we will also tell you  
But one thing we remember by heart  
We have happiness even  
In our occasional sadness.

Motylev expressed astonishment that the censors would allow such lyrics to be performed publicly. He also criticized the work of other jazz orchestras, which relied primarily on “imported songs”, which he described as “cacophonies” and “syncopated bellowing and neighing.”<sup>58</sup>

Other observers echoed Motylev’s misgivings about the repertoires of cinema jazz bands. The trombonist, conductor, and conservatory professor Vladislav Blazhevich saw Boris Renskii’s thea-jazz orchestra perform at the “Forum” cinema and was disgusted by what he heard. “Thea-jazz” is an abbreviation of “theatrical jazz” (*teatral’nyi dzhaz*). First conceptualized by Leonid Utesov, thea-jazz featured musicians who performed jazz music with flamboyant antics on stage, such as playing on one knee, or fomenting scripted arguments on stage. He described the set as so lacking in culture that it was not worth the extra 50 kopeks he paid to see the band before the film started. “Who gave Renskii the right to play this “thea-trash (*tea-makulatura* – a reference to the fact that Renskii’s orchestra was a ‘thea-jazz’ or ‘theatrical-jazz’ ensemble)”, Blazhevich asked. “Would it not be healthier for audiences to hear excerpts from dramaturgy or artistic

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<sup>58</sup> Iu. Motylev, “Muzyka v foie kino,” *Muzyka*, August 16, 1937.



literature and music?” Blazhevich, who in subsequent years would conduct the USSR State Wind Orchestra, concluded that Renskii’s “hackwork” (*khaltura*) needed to be banned from cinema foyers altogether.<sup>59</sup>

It was not only the type of music that cinema jazz bands performed, but also how well (or poorly) they performed that irked some critics, an objection that echoed criticisms in the West. Jazz music was, in playwright Naum Labkovskii’s opinion, the counterpoint to orchestral music. Referring to their tendency towards musical improvisation, he argued that jazz combos were nothing more than a “group of soloists” who were constantly trying to out-play one another, unwilling to submit to any kind of collective discipline. He further lamented that cinema administrators were so eager to hire jazz bands, that dozens formed practically overnight in order to cash in on the craze. Most of the musicians in these groups, Labkovskii argued, could barely play their instruments. He highlighted one “Jazz-Accordion” group that performed at the “Moskva” cinema and stated that, of the five accordion players in the group, only two could play their instruments properly. Poor quality musicianship could make even the best songs deplorable. Even though the jazz group that performed at the “Aurora” and “Spartak” cinemas exclusively played songs by Utesov’s orchestra and the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR, both of which were highly respected, it played them so badly that they amounted to nothing less than “high vulgarity.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Vlad. Blazhevich, “O teadzhaz khalture,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, December 29, 1935.

<sup>60</sup> N. Labkovskii, “V foie vystupaiut...,” *Vecherniaia Moskva*, April 5, 1939.

There was considerably less explicit criticism of jazz in restaurants and cafes, than in cinemas. Nevertheless, some observers decried the presence of jazz in cafes and restaurants. One early example of this came in 1934 when a new cafe opened on Pushkin Square in central Moscow. The cafe management decided it would be fitting to name the cafe Cafe Pushkin. This unleashed a controversy, spearheaded by the famous poet Demian Bedny, not merely because of the cafe's name, but because a cafe bearing the name of the great Russian poet would stoop to allowing something as crass as jazz to be played there.<sup>61</sup> One journalist wrote that it was obviously a point of pride for restaurant managers to be able to boast that they had a jazz band, but the author said the problem was these bands' borrowed too much from the "cheap music of western European revues and restaurants," specifically jazz.<sup>62</sup> Another writer offered the solution that restaurant (and cinema) managers needed to revive "string ensembles and salon orchestras" if they hoped to acculturate the working masses.<sup>63</sup>

Observers also expressed frustration over jazz's relationship with Soviet sound recording and radio. As with cinemas and restaurants/cafes, the prevalence of jazz in Soviet record production was a bone of contention. Some observers felt that the Soviet record industry should diverge sharply from its Western equivalent. Western phonograph listeners were treated to a massive roster of records, yet only a small percentage featured classical music or educational material. The overwhelming majority were, according to

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<sup>61</sup> "A Column From Moscow", *The Chicago Defender*, November 24, 1934.

<sup>62</sup> "Otkliki," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, May 29, 1934.

<sup>63</sup> "O legkoi muzyke," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, October 17, 1934.

Evgenii Braudo, “foxtrots” (*fokstroty*) – the early Soviet term for any up-tempo jazz song. The article concluded that this must not be the case in the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup> L. Agronov, a worker in *Pravda*’s print shop, complained that, while he would prefer to listen to speeches by Stalin or Lenin, this was impossible because they were hard to find. He implied that this was because all the country could manage to produce were “vulgar ditties or very sad work,” by which he meant jazz.<sup>65</sup> An even stronger condemnation came from S. Kulagin (probably the stage actor Sergei Kulagin) in his review of new records from early 1936. Kulagin stated that the majority of the records that Gramplasttrest, the state record manufacturer, released were “foxtrots, tangoes, rhumbas, and other Western dances,” that had been copied from imported records. Although Kulagin acknowledged that the situation was improving and that, from a technical standpoint, the quality of Soviet recordings was getting better, there was still too much low-quality music. Kulagin singled out a series of recordings in which singer Ivan Kozlovskii collaborated with Viktor Knushevitskii and his jazz orchestra. Kulagin described them as “anti-art” replete with “sugary-restauranty pseudolyricism.”<sup>66</sup>

Critics argued that radio technology fared little better in living up to its supposed transformative power. Musicologist Daniel Zhitomirskii argued that while radio had great potential to bring Soviet leisure (*otdykh*) through high quality art, jazz was not the music to achieve this. People “want to relax while listening to good music” he said, but

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<sup>64</sup> Braudo, “Ot agrominimuma do urokov frantsuzskogo iazyka.”

<sup>65</sup> L. Agronov, “Veselaia muzyka,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 20, 1933.

<sup>66</sup> S. Kulagin, “Novye plastinki,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, September 17, 1936.

audiences were being denied this music. Zhitomirskii then cited excerpts from radio listeners who objected to jazz on these grounds. One listener from Rostov complained about the many identical sounding foxtrots he heard, saying that he could find no discernable melody in any of them. Another listener expressed his annoyance at listening to the reproductor with friends after work and heard 47 minutes of jazz music. “Is this a joke?” he asked.<sup>67</sup>

It was not only the supposed deficiencies in record production or broadcasting choices, but also the ways that Soviet audiences used these technologies that frustrated the Soviet acculturation project. Even if the Soviet authorities had given in to critic demands and not pressed domestic jazz recordings, foreign jazz records still circulated within the country. The Leningrad-based writer and polyglot Sergei Kolbas’ev, for example, reputedly owned approximately 500 jazz records, most of which he had acquired while working as a diplomatic translator in Finland during the mid-1920s. He also developed a mechanism by which he could transfer these recordings on to blank acetate disks for other listeners.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, jazz enthusiasts in Novosibirsk benefited when *kharbintsy*—ethnic Russians who lived Harbin, the colonial enclave and hub of the Chinese Eastern Railway—repatriated to the Soviet Union in the wake of the Japanese occupation of Harbin during the 1930s. These *kharbintsy* came through Novosibirsk on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, bringing with them the latest American and European jazz

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<sup>67</sup> D. Zhitomirskii, “Traktirnaia estetika,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, October 29, 1934.

<sup>68</sup> *Plody prosveshcheniia. Peterburg: Vremia i mesto. Bliuz Mokhovoi ulitsy*, Documentary film, directed by Elena Plugatyreva, (2007; Sankt-Peterburg; Rossiia), Television; Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 9.

records, which were freely bought and sold in Harbin, Shanghai, and elsewhere in China.<sup>69</sup>

In the case of radio, one major issue was the presence of foreign broadcasting. Admittedly, this was not an option for all radio listeners. Only those with proper radio receivers, which cost considerably more than reproducers, could tune in to foreign radio stations. The content of foreign broadcasts could vary. Some people remembered listening to Orthodox Easter services from Bulgaria, but these stations were also a useful means of hearing the latest in jazz music.<sup>70</sup> Such opportunities were not confined to the European part of Soviet territory, either. Vladimir Trubetskoi, a former nobleman exiled to Andijan, Uzbekistan in 1934, wrote to his nephew that he liked to listen to the jazz music coming in from Mumbai and Delhi on his recently-acquired vacuum tube radio.<sup>71</sup> Despite the potential benefits, listening to foreign broadcasts was a risky proposition. Participants in the Harvard Interview Project all recalled that it required some secrecy, whether it was using headphones or listening at low volumes to make sure that nosy neighbors or family members did not overhear. Interviewees recalled varying levels of punishment for those caught listening to foreign broadcasts, ranging from a short jail sentence to execution.<sup>72</sup> While it may appear that such draconian measures were designed

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<sup>69</sup> Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi*, 20-21.

<sup>70</sup> On Bulgarian Easter see, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 7, Case 91 (interviewer J.R., type A4). Female, 55, Great Russian, Teacher. Widener Library, Harvard University.

<sup>71</sup> Family archive of Vladimir Sergeevich Trubetskoi (Letters from Vladimir Sergeevich Trubetskoi to Vladimir Mikhailovich Golytsin, 1934-1937).

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 118/(NY)1517 (interviewer W.T.). Widener Library, Harvard University, 49.

to discourage Soviet audiences from tuning in to the latest foreign music, the regime was more concerned with preventing the spread of foreign political propaganda or information unfiltered by Bolshevik censors.

### **Jazz Music and Dancing**

It was not merely jazz music itself that drew both admiration and ire, it was the way that audiences engaged with it. Besides listening, the most obvious way that audiences engaged with it was through dancing. If there is one leisure activity to which jazz is inextricably linked (or at least, it was until it was intellectualized in the 1950s), it is surely dancing. It is almost impossible to hear the hot jazz of Louis Armstrong, the more symphonic “sweet” jazz of Paul Whiteman, or the swing tones of Glenn Miller and not picture couples dancing to it. As in the rest of the world, Soviet audiences enjoyed dancing to jazz as well. Arkadii Kotliarskii, who played tenor saxophone in Leonid Utesov’s jazz orchestra for over two decades, said that when he first heard jazz, his feet started moving almost instinctually.<sup>73</sup> In Soviet parlance, some jazz songs were classified based upon the type of dancing one did to them. There were dozens of foxtrots, “slow-foxes”, tangos and rhumbas in Soviet jazz repertoires.

This inevitably became a point of friction amongst Soviet moralists and cultural elites, as it had amongst the same groups in the United States and elsewhere. As in most modern societies, the human body was a contested site onto which the Soviet regime sought to extend its power in order to normalize certain modes of behavior. The ways that

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<sup>73</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 4.

Soviet citizens engaged with one another and moved on the dance floor had a direct impact, many believed, upon their morality and ways of thought in regards to other matters as well. Consequently, there was great angst, for some at least, over how Soviet audiences should move their bodies to jazz music, if at all. Between the late 1920s and 1941, jazz dancing, particularly the foxtrot, was a point of contention between the Soviet state, cultural elites, and citizens. Debates and attitudes towards dancing – particularly dancing the foxtrot – indicate uncertainty about the inter-related phenomena of class consciousness, culturedness, and personal morality.

The regime itself was inconsistent in its approach to dancing. In the years immediately after the revolution, the Bolsheviks closed many of the dancehalls in Russia because they were, according to one official, “gathering places for counter-revolutionaries.”<sup>74</sup> During NEP dancehalls were begrudgingly tolerated and the foxtrot spread in popularity, although some Bolshevik moralists in the Komsomol complained about the decadent, immoral nature of dancing and were convinced that it would lead to “sexual excesses.”<sup>75</sup> At the First All-Union Musical Conference in 1929, Anatoly Lunacharskii, the Commissar of Enlightenment, declared that dances like the foxtrot were antithetical to Soviet culture and “pounded your will into a cutlet.”<sup>76</sup> Despite the angry rhetoric, western-style dances like the foxtrot and the rhumba were never formally banned, but were discouraged until the mid-1930s.

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 121.

<sup>75</sup> Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 123-125.

<sup>76</sup> Starr, *Red and Hot*, 92.

It is not clear why the regime suddenly softened its stance on dancing. Marina Aliakrinskaia posits that it was simply part of the transition from the asceticism of the First Five-Year Plan and cultural revolution to the “happy life in the country of victorious socialism.”<sup>77</sup> The popular rumor during the 1930s and 40s was that, sometime early in the 1930s, Kliment Voroshilov, the Commissar of Defense, humiliated himself at a foreign delegation ball when he declined a lady’s request to dance with her because he did not know how to dance. When Voroshilov returned to the Soviet Union, he immediately demanded that all soldiers must learn to dance, as a sign of culturedness.<sup>78</sup> While the Soviet regime itself alternately ignored, discouraged, and sanctioned dances like the foxtrot, this does not mean that Soviet citizens’ behavior aligned with such policies, nor does it mean that all Soviet citizens were willing to reconcile the foxtrot with Bolshevik values.

As we have seen, participants in the post-war Harvard Interview Project recalled that they and their friends enjoyed dancing, even when it was a supposedly illicit activity. One woman stated that, as a schoolgirl, she and her girlfriends would dance in the school bathroom since they were not allowed to dance anywhere else. They would often also dance at home to the phonograph, as there was less chance of getting caught and

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<sup>77</sup> Marina A. Aliakrinskaia, “Tanets i ideologiia: fokstrot v sovetskoi kul’ture 1920-1940 gg.,” *Vestnik SPbGUKI* 3 (12), sentiabr’ 2012 g., 27.

<sup>78</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 147/(NY)1467 (interviewer M.T., type A4). Male, 40, Great Russian, Engineer. Widener Library, Harvard University, 32. There is some variation amongst the nine different versions of this rumor, with some saying the incident occurred in Istanbul while others heard that it had happened in London. Most, however, agree that it happened around 1935.



reprimanded there.<sup>79</sup> Another person recalled that he and his friend used to take a phonograph out into the street with the implied intention of enticing young women to dance with them.<sup>80</sup> The very same ads in *Vecherniaia Moskva* mentioned earlier that promoted jazz in restaurants and movie theaters, also boasted dancing until the wee hours of the morning.<sup>81</sup> The regime was well aware of these kinds of activities. In a Central Committee Orgburo session from May 1933, Lazar Kaganovich, a close associate of Stalin's and, at the time, head of the Moscow City Communist Party Organization (Gorkom), asked one comrade Dorfman, a Young Pioneer leader, about cultural activities among the Young Pioneers in the October district of Moscow. At one point Kaganovich asked Dorfman if members of his local Pioneer chapter ever danced the foxtrot. When Dorfman replied in the negative, Kaganovich was unconvinced. "They probably dance it," he said, "you just don't know about it."<sup>82</sup> After the regime sanctioned dancing, it became compulsory, particularly for soldiers, as an expression of culturedness to rival Europeans. Guidebooks with detailed descriptions of the foxtrot circulated in Gorkii Park

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<sup>79</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97/(NY)1528 (interviewer M.T., type A4). Female, 39, Ukrainian, Commercial artist. Widener Library, Harvard University, 42.

<sup>80</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 13, Case 446 (interviewer J.O.). Widener Library, Harvard University, 28-29.

<sup>81</sup> *Vecherniaia Moskva*'s edition from March 15, 1933, for example, featured an ad to see A.V. Frolov's band at the Novo-moskovskaia hotel.

<sup>82</sup> Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Solokov, *Stalinism as a way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 382-383.

for the benefit of those who wanted to use its dance plazas.<sup>83</sup> Even Komsomol branches, in an attempt to attract young people, hosted dances after meetings.<sup>84</sup>

Jazz dancing had its detractors dating back to the days of war communism. In 1920, one Petrograd-based journalist argued that the foxtrot was a tool in the international bourgeoisie's campaign against Bolshevism.<sup>85</sup> Many observers within and outside the party obsessed over the spread of illicit sexuality and viewed dances like the foxtrot and the Charleston as highly pornographic evidence of how the New Economic Policy had contaminated the virgin socialist utopia.<sup>86</sup> Like many other aspects of "bourgeois" culture that appeared in the Soviet Union during the NEP era, the foxtrot and similar dances were described in sexualized terms. An anonymous article in the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* described the foxtrot as a "new kind of pornography" and a product of "sexual pathology."<sup>87</sup> For much of the decade, moralists waged war on the foxtrot, tango, and other dances, until they were outright banned in the later years of the decade.<sup>88</sup>

Even after the foxtrot and other dances were made legal again, there were still those who regarded them as pathologically dangerous, not to mention derivative. One

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<sup>83</sup> *Massovye i bal'nye tantsy*, (Moskva, Nauchno-metodicheskii tsentr Tsentral'nogo parka kul'tury i otdykha im. M. Gorkogo, 1936), 28. The book uses the title "Tahiti Trot", in reference to Shostakovich's variation on "Tea For Two", but the instructions match those for the foxtrot.

<sup>84</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule B, Vol. 22, Case 449 (interviewer M.F.). Widener Library, Harvard University, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Aliakrinskaia, "Tanets i ideologiia," 24.

<sup>86</sup> Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 15-17.

<sup>87</sup> Aliakrinskaia, "Tanets i ideologiia," 25.

<sup>88</sup> Aliakrinskaia, "Tanets i ideologiia," 27.

journalist could not fathom how a new dance plaza at Gorkii Park, devoted especially to western dances like the foxtrot and the Charleston could ever develop culturedness in its patrons.<sup>89</sup> *Komsomolskaia Pravda* wrote in 1935 that “criminal and strange elements have penetrated dancing courses and are... corrupting work among workers and student youth.” The paper criticized Moscow’s trade union education department for sleeping at the wheel while insidious elements coopted dance classes to teach unsavory jazz dances to innocent youths.<sup>90</sup> According to the *New York Times*’ correspondent, *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* complained about the dance craze once more a few years later. The paper received a series of letters from girls and mothers bemoaning the moral laxity and promiscuity of young Soviet men. The paper laid the blame squarely on jazz dancing, arguing that the Soviet regime’s slackened attitude towards formerly “bourgeois” dances, combined with poor quality of instruction in dance courses, meant that “many young people are carrying [jazz dancing] to extremes” and this had a degenerative effect on Soviet morality.<sup>91</sup> Other observers remained critical, but expressed some understanding about the foxtrot’s popularity. Of course, wrote one journalist, young people want to dance and have fun. This was perfectly normal. The problem, according to him, was that the foxtrot and its ilk were “erotic” dances and did not result in increased happiness

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<sup>89</sup> “Luchshe otdykhat’, chtoby luchshe rabotat’”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 14, 1933.

<sup>90</sup> *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* as quoted in “Rumba and Foxtrot Held To Be Foes of Soviet Youth,” *New York Times*, August 28, 1935.

<sup>91</sup> Harold Denny, “Laxity of Youths Berated in Soviet,” *New York Times*, November 22, 1938.

among practitioners. Instead, the author argued, what was needed were new “mass dances” that would improve upon and transcend the foxtrot.<sup>92</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The scene in the MASSOLIT house from *Master and Margarita* that opens this chapter is not the only expression of ambivalence towards Soviet jazz in the novel. The scene introduces a theme that runs throughout: the inseparable joy and anguish jazz elicited. Whenever jazz music appears in Bulgakov’s novel, whether live or on a phonograph, it juxtaposes the song and the expression “Hallelujah!” with the devilish activities of Woland and his entourage. Nowhere is this more evident than at Satan’s Great Ball, where Margarita witnesses a raucous jazz band trying to out-play Johann Strauss. Upon seeing Margarita, the jazz conductor shouts “Hallelujah!” and proceeds to comically beat his musicians with cymbals. The implied tension between the joy that jazz provided to some and the hellishness others equated with it is made explicit at Satan’s Ball.

The multiple references to jazz in Bulgakov’s masterpiece are unintelligible without appreciating that jazz was a constant presence in the Soviet urban leisure culture of the 1930s. It could be encountered in a variety of places either in person or via mass technology. Jazz’s presence was less an initiative of state policy and more a response to popular demand. The Soviet cultural bureaucracy did not demand jazz in venues like cinemas and resorts, but the genre was so popular that it became an integral part of the

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<sup>92</sup> “O sovetskom tantse,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, April 23, 1936.

Soviet leisure program. This popular demand, however, clashed with many preconceptions about the nature of leisure in a socialist society and what kind of cultural experiences could instill and reinforce “proper” ways of acting, thinking, and being. As a result, jazz became something of a battle ground upon which the struggle to determine the meaning of culturedness was waged.

For jazz’s supporters, jazz music was perfectly compatible with the New Soviet Person and provided a healthy, productive way to spend one’s time away from work. It consequently could be found in some of the key spaces of Soviet acculturation, especially cinemas, but also in restaurants and cafes, parks, and other venues, as well as on new technologies like radio and the phonograph; technologies that were meant to help maximize human potential. As Bulgakov’s thin-voiced jazz singer implied, jazz could, in a way, help to create a heavenly utopia on earth.

For others, however, jazz’s presence was a constant, devilish threat. It was not only the genre’s Western origins that they objected to (and that some saw as reason enough to ban it), but because they interpreted it as a millstone around the neck of the New Soviet Person. To them, jazz music was nothing more than a vulgar cacophony, often performed by musicians who could not tell the difference between their instruments and a hole in the ground. Such “music” paled in comparison with more “cultured” works by classical composers. What made matters worse was that when Soviet audiences engaged with this music, they did so through dances that were at best off-putting and at worst downright pornographic. How could the Soviet people expect to build a utopia if they allowed themselves to behave in such ways? As Bulgakov himself implied,

audiences may have thought they were in heaven, but it was clear to him that they were in hell.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Leonid Utesov: Socialist Celebrity for a Soviet Public

#### Introduction

In a scene from Grigorii Aleksandrov's landmark 1934 film, *The Merry Guys* (*Veselye rebiata*), the shepherd-turned-bandleader Kostia Potekhin, played by jazz singer and real-life bandleader Leonid Utesov, rehearses with his jazz orchestra in preparation for an upcoming concert at the Bolshoi Theater. When the band is disrupted by a strange noise coming from the neighboring apartment, Kostia leaves to find the building manager and, after he leaves, a disagreement between musicians leads to a whole scale, slapstick fight. While band members brawl with each other, Kostia pleads his case to the indifferent building manager, saying that the noise from next door is wreaking havoc on their work. When it is revealed that the noise is simply a child's toy, the incredulous building manager suggests that the real problem is Kostia's ensemble.

"Maybe it's your musicians, Comrade Potekhin?" she posits.

"No, that's not possible, comrade," he replies. "We're creative workers." When they discover that his band is in fact causing the ruckus, the building manager throws the group out of the apartment.

The humorous juxtaposition of Kostia's chaotic orchestra, his staunch defense of his musicians, and the building manager's obvious dislike of them, are a succinct and self-deprecating reenactment in miniature of Leonid Utesov's own career. Like Kostia, he was an immigrant to the metropolis, born and raised on the periphery of the Russian empire. As an early champion of jazz music, which Utesov strongly believed had a place in Soviet society, Utesov was, like Kostia, not often taken seriously by the authorities.

The major difference, and an ironic joke that film audiences would surely have noted, was that Utesov was not some nobody from the countryside trying to make it big in Moscow. At the time of the film's release, he was already one of the biggest names in Soviet entertainment and, by the end of the decade, would be one of the most popular figures in the Soviet Union. His performances—a blend of jazz music and theatricality, which he labelled “theatrical jazz” (thea-jazz)—were heavily attended and tickets to his concerts sold out quickly. The technologies of mass culture and mass communication that were outlined in the previous chapter brought greater uniformity to the cultural experiences of Soviet citizens. The mass circulation of radio broadcasts, cinema, and records meant that more and more citizens saw the same films, sang the same songs, and could identify the same performers. All this helped to facilitate Utesov's rise to stardom during the 1930s.

Most scholars of celebrity culture agree that celebrities are signifiers—representations of certain values that they both reflect and reinforce. Some like Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue that celebrities are part of a capitalist “culture industry” run by entertainment businesses and public relations firms to ensure that mass audiences remain docile consumers.<sup>93</sup> P. David Marshall, on the other hand, argues that celebrities are used by governments or other institutions of power as a form of crowd control by modeling “normal” modes of behavior that mass audiences are meant to

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<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” Marxists.org, accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>.



emulate.<sup>94</sup> More recently, scholars such as Chris Rojek have incorporated audiences into their analysis of celebrity by highlighting the overlaps and disconnects between elite and mass interpretations of celebrities.<sup>95</sup> In all cases, scholars agree that celebrities are more than simply noteworthy individuals that people are drawn to—they are invested with meaning.

This investiture of meaning onto celebrities is illustrated in pre-revolutionary Russian urban culture. As Russia began to industrialize in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a burgeoning middle class began to assert its influence on culture. New popular figures emerged and became famous because they reflected and reinforced the values of this new middle class, rather than the values of the aristocracy. For example, the actress Maria Savina reflected and reinforced new attitudes towards female behavior through the strong female roles she played on stage as well as through the clothes she wore for her roles and on the street. Similarly, audiences saw opera singer Fedor Shaliapin's diverse roles on stage, as well as his notoriously diva-esque behavior off stage, as manifestations of the performative nature of modern life and the melodramatic struggle to articulate an authentic sense of self.<sup>96</sup>

Celebrity culture in Russia transcended the revolutionary period and the transition from capitalism to socialism. For example, the mania surrounding Douglas Fairbanks and

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<sup>94</sup> P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 45-49.

<sup>95</sup> Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 33-45.

<sup>96</sup> On Savina, see Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 115-131; On Shaliapin, see Anna Fishzon, *Fandom, Authenticity, and Opera: Mad Acts and Letter Scenes in Fin-de-Siecle Russia* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 47-78.

Mary Pickford's visit to the Soviet Union in 1926 was so sensational that it inspired the film *The Kiss of Mary Pickford*, which satirized Soviet audiences' obsession with film stars. Although the glossy magazines and other typical mechanisms for promoting celebrities disappeared under Stalin, a vast array of celebrities captured public attention during his reign.

In this chapter, I analyze Leonid Utesov's celebrity persona, in the ways it was both projected and consumed, and argue that it constituted an arena of the jazz public sphere. Audiences ascribed certain values to Utesov's persona, that they identified as important characteristics in the model Soviet citizen. Utesov's celebrity status differs significantly from the more well-known hero-celebrities of the Stalin period such as the coal miner Aleksei Stakhanov or the aviator Valerii Chkalov, who were actively promoted and feted by the Stalinist regime. Utesov is the most conspicuous example of a body of celebrities—many of whom worked within Soviet leisure culture—who were widely loved despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that they received little to no official recognition by the Stalinist regime. Other celebrities of this ilk include other *estrada* singers like Lidia Ruslanova, Izabella Iur'eva, and Vadim Kozin. Ironically, it is these figures in the pantheon of Stalinist celebrities who have proved most enduring in the post-Soviet collective memory.

The idea that celebrity personae are as much the product of popular interpretation as elite packaging and marketing, and that members of a public can, by popular assent, identify the individuals they admire and emulate, reveals another arena of the Soviet jazz public sphere. Analyzing the ways that Soviet audiences interpreted their celebrities, especially when compared to how the Stalinist regime promoted and engaged with them,

reveals the values that audiences identified with their celebrities. In this chapter, I argue that the Soviet jazz public sphere fostered a conversation between the general Soviet population and political and cultural elites about what Soviet society should look like. They articulated their view through their interpretations of Utesov's celebrity persona and his music.

To argue this point, I analyze the political and cultural context in which Utesov's rise to fame occurred in order to show that his "theatrical jazz" (thea-jazz) style contradicted the prevailing official sentiments in Soviet music. I then compare his celebrity status to those of the Stalinist hero-celebrities to determine the extent to which the values they were ascribed overlap. Finally, I analyze fan mail to Utesov to show that fans responded to and interpreted Utesov's public persona in a wide variety of ways that sometimes overlapped with the characteristics of hero-celebrities, but often did not. The environment in which Utesov rose to popularity and the nature of his celebrity status suggests that the intersection of jazz and celebrity in Stalinist culture created a public sphere in which fundamental questions about the nature of Soviet society could be negotiated and catalyzed by the Soviet public.

### **Utesov: A Brief Biography**

Utesov was born Lazar Osipovich Veisbein (Weissbein) in Odessa in 1895. It is fitting that the Soviet Union's first jazz star should come from Odessa because the city was in many ways a Russian version of New Orleans—a fitting birthplace for the Soviet Union's first major jazz starr. Although founded by Catherine the Great (with a French Governor, like New Orleans) to be a major colonial outpost in *Novorossia* (New Russia),

the territories she conquered from the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, Odessa quickly became a cosmopolitan center. Sailors and residents of Greek, German, and Italian descent interacted with the city's Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, and sizable Jewish populations to a degree rarely found in other cities of the Empire and this greatly influenced the city's musical and literary cultures.<sup>97</sup>

In his 1976 memoir Utesov stated that Odessa's rich cultural personality had a strong influence upon his character and professional development. He recalled that the best education was not to be found in any of the city's theaters, but in the streets and in the everyday actions and interactions of Odessans themselves.<sup>98</sup> Utesov even saw connections between Odessa and New Orleans when he suggested, half-jokingly, that Odessan music, particularly that of the Jewish population, was akin to a proto-jazz. He said that Jewish musicians rarely knew how to read music or understood music theory and this led to an emotive, improvisational form of music that differed from that of New Orleans's black jazz orchestras only in instrumentation.<sup>99</sup>

Utesov, who came from a musical family, and learned to sing and play numerous instruments as a student at the Genrykh Faiga Gymnasium in Odessa.<sup>100</sup> Yet despite his musical proclivities, Utesov's first forays into professional entertainment came as an

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<sup>97</sup> David MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People: Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in the Russian Popular Song* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 114; Rebecca Stanton, "Identity Crisis: The Literary Cult and Culture of Odessa in the Early Twentieth Century," *Symposium* 57(3), Fall 2003, 119-120.

<sup>98</sup> Leonid Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!* (Moskva: Vagrius, 2000), 13-69.

<sup>99</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 112.

<sup>100</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 38-43.

acrobat and clown in a local circus. In the immediate pre-war years, Utesov abandoned the circus in favor of *estrada*, the Russian term for the light entertainment and variety theaters, and established himself as a gifted orator, telling jokes and reciting couplets and other literary works. It was also during the pre-war era that he exchanged his overtly Jewish name for a Russian one, settling on the stage name “Leonid Utesov.”<sup>101</sup>

Having served in the tsarist army during World War I, Utesov returned to Odessa in 1917 to live with his wife Elena, whom he married in 1914 and his infant daughter Edith, who would be his on-stage partner for much of the 1930s and 40s.<sup>102</sup> They remained in the city during the White occupation and Utesov continued to perform alongside artists like Aleksandr Vertinskii, who later fled with White forces when the Bolsheviks seized the city in 1920. During the NEP years, Utesov moved his family from periphery to center and he worked in the “light theaters” (*teatry miniatiur*) in Moscow and Leningrad. Still, music was not a central part of his repertoire and by the mid-1920s, Utesov was beginning to consider himself an actor first and foremost.<sup>103</sup>

This changed in 1927, when Utesov was invited to perform as an actor and dramatic reader at the Marine Theater in non-Soviet Riga. His tenure there was so successful that he was invited to tour other cities in the Baltics.<sup>104</sup> After his tour, Utesov

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<sup>101</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 57. While Utesov does not claim that he changed his name because Veisbein sounded too Jewish, but given that he was asked to change it before performing in a vaudeville show, it is likely that it was a factor.

<sup>102</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 101-116. Utesov’s recollections from the war feature scant reference to combat and he prefers to reminisce about comrades, crusty superior officers, and moonlighting in local theaters.

<sup>103</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 180.

<sup>104</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 180.

took the opportunity to spend a few months in Berlin and Paris, cities he had “heard so much about as a child on the docks of Odessa’s port.”<sup>105</sup>

It so happens that both cities were in the midst of their own jazz ages and the genre was an integral part of Berliner and Parisian popular entertainment. According to Peter Jelavich, “the melodies of revues [in Weimer Berlin] came to be increasingly dominated by fox trot and jazz rhythms.”<sup>106</sup> Likewise, Paris boasted a robust nightlife that featured several African-American artists, most notably Josephine Baker, who performed at the major cabarets and theaters in Montmartre like the Folies Bergère, the Moulin Rouge, and Chat Noir.<sup>107</sup> These cabarets and music halls were important venues for the translation of jazz from its more “American” form into something more palatable and intelligible to French audiences in the 1920s.<sup>108</sup>

Though Utesov had seen *The Chocolate Kiddies* and Benny Peyton’s Jazz Kings in the Soviet Union in 1926, it was in Paris that jazz first stimulated Utesov’s artistic nerves. He realized that jazz was the art form he had been seeking for years – the perfect synthesis of music and theater.<sup>109</sup> Of all the groups that Utesov saw in Paris, it was

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<sup>105</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 180. It is not clear how long Utesov stayed in Berlin, but he spent a month in Paris and an unspecified amount of time in Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the Basque country (where he met Fiodor Shliapin) before returning home.

<sup>106</sup> Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 169.

<sup>107</sup> See both Jackson, *Making Jazz French* and William A. Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 186-187. In his memoirs, Utesov refers to the Jazz Kings as trombonist Frank Withers’s group, not Benny Peyton’s. Starr discusses both Wooding’s and Peyton’s groups in Starr, *Red and Hot*, 54-57, 62-66.

American bandleader Ted “Is Everybody Happy?” Lewis who most inspired him. Lewis made his musicians memorize their music so they could move about the stage and develop their own stage personas. Band members were equal parts showman and musician.<sup>110</sup>

Upon Utesov’s return to Leningrad, his new home after leaving Odessa some years earlier, he immediately set about formulating his artistic philosophy, inspired by Lewis, which he called “theatrical jazz” (*teatral’nyi dzhaz*, often shortened to *tea-dzhaz*), which blended jazz and jazz-influenced music with theatrical panache. Utesov disliked traditional instrumental ensembles because he found them too abstract and mechanical, with each musician acting as a mere cog in a machine. Instead, Utesov wanted his performers to express their humanity and relationship to one another during their performances. He encouraged them to “dance” during songs by wiggling their legs around while seated, to get out of their seats and approach the conductor in the middle of a song, to get into arguments and reconcile on stage (something evident in the fight scene in *The Merry Guys*). Likewise, as director, Utesov engaged with individual musicians and had unique relationships with each one of them.<sup>111</sup> He gathered a group of musicians who would be open to performing the new genre and who combined the musicianship and theatricality to carry it off.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> On Lewis’s band, see S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in Soviet Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 148. On Utesov’s inspiration, see Arkadii Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!: Vospominaniia starogo utesovtza* (Leningrad: Samizdat, 1982), 15.

<sup>111</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 202-203.

<sup>112</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 15-16. According to S. Frederick Starr, one trombonist walked out of his audition for the group because he refused to play while down on one knee. See Starr, *Red and Hot*, 149.

Leningrad proved to be a fruitful breeding ground for Soviet jazz musicians. In addition to housing one of the major musical conservatories, the city was home to writer, naval officer, and fellow Odessan Sergei Kolbas'ev, arguably the Soviet Union's greatest pre-war jazz aficionado. Until his arrest and execution in 1937, Kolbas'ev owned one of the largest collections of foreign jazz recordings in the Soviet Union.<sup>113</sup> Arkadii Kotliarskii, Utesov's long-time tenor saxophonist, recalled that Kolbas'ev's door was open to any jazz enthusiasts who wanted to listen to the latest records and Kotliarskii himself remembered listening to Jack Hylton, Guy Lombardo, Cab Calloway, and Duke Ellington, among others, in Kolbas'ev's sitting room.<sup>114</sup> In this atmosphere, Utesov had no trouble assembling an orchestra that included Kotliarskii and trumpeter Iakov Skomorovskii, who would eventually become a respected bandleader in his own right.

Utesov's thea-jazz debuted in March 1929, at the height of the nationwide drive for mass industrialization, collectivization in agriculture and, crucially for Utesov, cultural revolution against "bourgeois" influences in the arts and sciences. a period that many historians describe as the "Great Break" from the semi-capitalist years of the mid-1920s. Despite conflict with the forces of the Great Break, which is described in more detail below, Utesov's popularity increased and he became one of the Soviet Union's most renowned entertainers. By the early 1930s, Utesov was so well known that his band mates began using pseudonyms to address him in public so that people did not recognize

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<sup>113</sup> Kolbas'ev's arrest derived from his work as a trade delegate in Finland during the 1920s, and his NKVD record charges him with being a Finnish "mole" (*razpodin*) in the USSR. *Plody prosveshcheniia. Peterburg: Vremia i mesto. Bliuz Mokhovoii ulitsy*, Documentary film, directed by Elena Plugatyreva, (2007; Sankt-Peterburg; Rossiia), Television.

<sup>114</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 9-10.



and mob him.<sup>115</sup> Utesov's star rose precipitously after he and his band appeared alongside Liubov' Orlova in the 1934 film *The Merry Guys*, which featured the vignette that opened this chapter. From that point on, he was one of the most highly sought-after performers in the country. For the rest of the decade, Utesov's orchestra toured endlessly from Ukraine to the Far East, and was a regular feature in estrada theaters, houses of culture, military bases, and the Caucasus and Black Sea resort circuit. They also recorded dozens of records and could be heard regularly on Soviet radio. By the eve of war, Utesov was arguably the second most popular figure in the Soviet Union after Stalin himself and, according to popular rumor, one of the richest men in the country.<sup>116</sup>

### **Utesov, “Thea-jazz,” and Cultural Revolution**

The best evidence that Utesov owed his rise to fame to popular support, is that the first several years of Utesov's jazz career took place in a politico-cultural climate that was overtly hostile to jazz music. The spirit and rhetoric of cultural revolution from 1928-1932 amplified the vehement criticism that jazz music had received during NEP. Activists, particularly in the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), sought to make Soviet music more “proletarian” in both the class background of composers and in content, though this platform was often unclear or contradictory.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 25.

<sup>116</sup> On Utesov's rumored wealth, see Starr, *Red and Hot*, 132.

<sup>117</sup> Amy Nelson, “The Struggle for Proletarian Music: RAPM and the Cultural Revolution,” *Slavic Review* 59(1), Spring 2002, 101-132. Nelson points out that RAPM was often in competition with rival organizations.

RAPM sought music that was “intelligible to the masses” and attacked both the established classical canon (including nineteenth-century Russian composers) and avant-garde “formalist” compositions for being too “bourgeois.”

RAPM particularly detested popular music of the “light genres” (as opposed to serious music like operas and symphonies), including jazz, gypsy songs, lyrical romances, and other forms of *estrada*. The Bolshevik revolution happened too recently, RAPMists argued, for Soviet audiences to have adopted proletarian mindsets, so if they responded positively to a piece of music – any piece of music – it was evidence of that music’s bourgeois nature. RAPM particularly detested light music because of its lyricism and emotive nature. Lyricism, according to RAPM, smacked of bourgeois individualism and at a time when Soviet citizens needed to work together to carry out the industrialization goals of the First Five-Year Plan and the collectivization of Soviet agriculture, such individualism would be counterproductive. Rather, music should be politically and ideologically engaged in the task of enlightening the masses and helping to fulfill the country’s economic goals.<sup>118</sup> *Estrada* artists such as the Leningrad-born singer Vadim Kozin and the Ukrainian Klavdiia Shul’zhenko, recalled how RAPM’s criticism dogged their careers in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>119</sup>

RAPM’s anti-jazz platform was partially inspired by Maxim Gorkii’s infamous tirade against jazz in *Pravda* in 1928, wherein he called it a “loathsome, maniacal cacophony” designed to appeal to “fat people” and “predators,” that is, those who had

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<sup>118</sup> Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 227.

<sup>119</sup> B.A. Savchenko, *Vadim Kozin* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1993), 42; Klavdiia Shul’zhenko, *Kogda vy sprositate menia...* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1981), 62-66.

benefited economically from the New Economic Policy of the mid-1920s.<sup>120</sup> RAPM further developed its anti-jazz platform, arguing that Soviet music should be used to mobilize workers and peasants to fulfill the Five-Year Plan. Jazz, however, hindered this goal. According to RAPM, jazz music “fogs [the worker’s] consciousness and leads him away from the ranks of active fighters for socialism.”<sup>121</sup> Music featuring syncopation or repetitive rhythmic sequences, as jazz often did, dragged listeners away from political consciousness and back into bourgeois mindsets and habits.<sup>122</sup> In other instances, RAPM argued that jazz, and especially jazz dancing, encouraged debauchery. Like many in the West who disliked jazz, they drew connections between jazz and sexuality. Gorkii himself thought that jazz was so sexualized, it sounded as if “some half-man, half-horse must be conducting [the orchestra] with his immense phallus.”<sup>123</sup> RAPM members thought jazz, and especially the dancing associated with it, would encourage moral laxity.<sup>124</sup>

Although historians argue that RAPM’s influence in Soviet music was far more limited than that of its sister organization, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) in Soviet literature during the Cultural Revolution, the organization caused many headaches among jazz musicians and is widely regarded as the main antagonist of early

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<sup>120</sup> Maksim Gorkii, “O muzyke tol’stiakh,” *Pravda*, April 18, 1928.

<sup>121</sup> Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*, 222.

<sup>122</sup> Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*, 222.

<sup>123</sup> Gorkii, “O muzyke tol’stiakh”.

<sup>124</sup> Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*, 223. Nelson points out the connections between RAPM’s prudishness and Eric Naiman’s work on the sexual language used to express anxiety about NEP.

Soviet jazz.<sup>125</sup> Even after Stalin forcibly disbanded RAPM by Party decree in 1932, its influence persisted. Utesov recalled that while he was in early discussions with cinema boss Boris Shumiatskii about filming *The Merry Guys*, Shumiatskii refused to hire Isaak Dunaevskii, Utesov's longtime collaborator and a specialist in light music, as the film's composer. According to Utesov, this was because of RAPM's residual influence in the music industry. It was only when Utesov threatened to walk away from the project altogether that Shumiatskii gave in and hired Dunaevskii, who would go on to become one of the most highly respected composers of the decade.<sup>126</sup>

The "proletarian" influence on Soviet culture also persisted in the person of Platon Mikhailovich Kerzhentsev. Kerzhentsev was an Old Bolshevik who worked as a journalist for several years before serving as deputy head of Agitprop during the Cultural Revolution. He had a much larger influence on Soviet music during the 1930s, first as head of the All-Union Radio Committee from 1933-36 and then as director of the All-Union Committee of Arts Affairs from 1936-38. Though he was not a member of RAPM, Kerzhentsev shared its distaste for light music, which he begrudgingly tolerated during the 1930s. On numerous occasions, he and Utesov argued about the place of *estrada* generally and jazz specifically in Soviet music. On one occasion, when Kerzhentsev dismissed *estrada* as a "third rate art form."<sup>127</sup> Utesov responded that Lenin regularly saw

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<sup>125</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 212; Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazhu!*, 14; A.N. Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman: Korifei sovetskogo dzhaza* (Moskva: Muzyka, 2006), 24; Starr, *Red and Hot*, 88-94; Klavdiia Shul'zhenko, *Kogda vy sproshte mne...* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1981), 62-66.

<sup>126</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 225.

<sup>127</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 214.

the singer and estrada artist Gaston Montéhus perform while Lenin lived in Paris. When Kerzhentsev said, “You, Leonid Osipovich, are no Montéhus,” Utesov replied that Kerzhentsev was no Lenin either!<sup>128</sup>

Utesov’s thea-jazz clashed with RAPM’s aesthetic politics not only in performance style, but also in repertoire. While the band’s early repertoire included foreign jazz songs like “Gonna Get a Girl” and “St. Louis Blues,” it was the inclusion of numerous “criminals songs” (*blatnaia pesnia*) of Utesov’s native Odessa that drew the greatest ire.<sup>129</sup> Since the beginning of his entertainment career, Utesov drew on the myths of Old Odessa, the Russian Empire’s city of sin, and so by the time that “thea-jazz” debuted, he already had a reputation for championing the works of “criminal culture.”<sup>130</sup> These included songs like “Gop so smykom” (loosely but imperfectly translated as “Natural Born Thief”) about a boastful fiddler who woos wedding guests and then robs them, a rendition of the gangster song “Little Lemons” (*Limonchiki*), and Odessan Eduard Bagritskii’s poem “Smugglers” (*Kontrabandisty*) set to the music of “My Blue Heaven.”<sup>131</sup>

The most famous Odessan “criminal song” in Utesov’s repertoire, and the one that became his first hit, to use his own words, was “From the Odessa Jail” (*S odesskogo*

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<sup>128</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 214-215.

<sup>129</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 853, l. 64. (Compiled list of Utesov’s jazz repertoire over the course of his career).

<sup>130</sup> Jarrod Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers: Russia’s Jews and the Myth of Old Odessa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 113.

<sup>131</sup> Tanny, *City of Rogues*, 216, 96. The term *limonchiki* is rhyming slang for “millions of rubles” (*millionchiki*). For “Smugglers” see RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 853, l. 64.

*kichmana*). A retelling of a prison break by two army deserters, most of the song is sung from the perspective of one of the escapees who, mortally wounded, sings a dying soliloquy asking his partner to prepare his grave and tell his mother that he died bravely.<sup>132</sup> Utesov argued that he sang this song ironically, delicately satirizing the romanticism of criminal songs. Given the comic nature of Utesov's singing in the recorded version, in which he caricatures his singing to an unusually high degree by over-accentuating words and hiccupping some passages, he was clearly not plumbing the depths of human emotion in his performance. Nevertheless, many critics thought the opposite – that Utesov was himself romanticizing criminal culture.<sup>133</sup> It was these Odessan songs, rather than his American numbers, that many critics and fans associated with Utesov for some years afterwards. When Stalin's entourage gathered to watch a preview screening of *The Merry Guys*, Andrei Zhdanov curtly dismissed Utesov as a master "only of criminal songs."<sup>134</sup> It is remarkable that such songs could propel Utesov to fame (and notoriety in certain sectors) during this period.

Utesov's music not only contradicted "proletarian" ideals, it openly challenged RAPM's stance toward music. Utesov took it upon himself to promote jazz at every turn, sometimes giving short speeches before performances where he defended the genre as

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<sup>132</sup> In the recorded version of the song, Utesov sings that they have escaped from an Odessan prison and rest in a "criminals' den" (*malina*) somewhere outside the city. However, other sources say that when he performed the song live, Utesov sang that the criminals escaped *to* Odessa, further propagating the city's reputation as a city of criminals. See "S odesskogo kichmana," A-pesni, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://a-pesni.org/dvor/sodesskogo.php>.

<sup>133</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 208-209.

<sup>134</sup> RGASPI f. 558, op. 11, d. 828, l. 48. (A brief record of a conversation between Boris Shumiatskii, Stalin, and others while viewing motion pictures, July 14, 1934.)

“merry, cheerful, buoyant (*zhizneradost’nyi*) music of the industrial epoch.”<sup>135</sup> After RAPM was forcibly dismantled in April 1932, Utesov gleefully danced on the organization’s proverbial grave in his 1932 revue *The Music Shop* (*Muzykal’nyi magazin*) in which he satirized RAPM through song. In one number, “Meeting at the Roundhouse” (*Mitinge v parovoznom depo*), which Utesov satirically claimed was written by RAPM, he clumsily pounded on the keys of a piano with his palms and elbows, an allusion to the fact that RAPM figures were often better critics than musicians, while tearfully telling the story of the elephant who was mercilessly killed so his tusks could be used to make the keys for the very same piano. Arkadii Kotliarskii, Utesov’s longtime tenor saxophonist, recalled that this was but one example of Utesov’s open and contentious dispute with RAPM’s “obscurantism.”<sup>136</sup> Not only was the show well received by audiences, but served as the creative embryo that would become *The Merry Guys*.<sup>137</sup>

Utesov’s popularity rose not only despite RAPM’s loud and vehement criticisms, but also amid a wave of mixed reactions from the Soviet press. The tension over Utesov’s performances is apparent in press reaction to and reviews of his repertoire. It was journalists and critics, after all, who reviewed his concerts and recordings.

Utesov seemed to succeed in spite of press criticism. To be sure, Utesov had his share of supporters in the Soviet press. Simon Dreiden, a highly celebrated theater and literary critic, offered a glowing review of “thea-jazz’s” debut and recognized the irony in

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<sup>135</sup> Vladimir Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR: Po stranitsam pechati, 1922-1940 gg.* (Leningrad-Voronezh: Samizdat, 1972), 23.

<sup>136</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 14.

<sup>137</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 224.

Utesov's performance of "From the Odessa Jail."<sup>138</sup> *Red Gazette (Krasnaia gazeta)* noted that he made some "not unsuccessful" attempts at making satirical music.<sup>139</sup> Playwright and theater critic Mikhail Zagorskii admired Utesov's blending of talent, wit, and merriment to infuse his performances with a "comic and sometimes even a lyrical affect."<sup>140</sup> Other reviewers said that Utesov's talent and expertise were in evidence in spite of poor writing for his shows.<sup>141</sup>

Despite these supportive reviews, Utesov was regularly pilloried in the Soviet press during the early 1930s. One critical review, submitted to the weekly cultural newspaper *Sovetskoe iskusstva* by a workers' brigade, stated that "Utesov's jazz... is blatant plagiarism of the Moulin Rouge and La Scala adjusted for ideology. Whose ideology? [That of] the bourgeois theorists of the foxtrot, calling for the universal language of the saxophone."<sup>142</sup> Another anonymous critic, while accepting the potential utility of jazz in the Soviet context, criticized Utesov's performance including the "hideous floral-cologne exotic foxtrot 'Congo'", suggesting that the song evoked a combination of foreign-ness and bourgeois decadence (or that it simply stunk).<sup>143</sup> Indeed, Utesov became so associated with "improper" entertainment, that the term "utesovism"

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<sup>138</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 22.

<sup>139</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 24.

<sup>140</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 24.

<sup>141</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 29.

<sup>142</sup> Brigada Rabkorov, "Dvukh putei ne dano: propaganda fokstrota v Miuzik-Kholle", *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, January 9, 1932.

<sup>143</sup> "Estrada i estradnik", *Sovietskoe iskusstvo*, July 20, 1933.



(*utesovshchina*) became slang for blending jazz and Soviet themes, as opposed to jazz that was strictly derivative of western styles and themes.<sup>144</sup> The most blatant critics, Utesov remembered, declared that his music was profane and a form of “prostitution in music.”<sup>145</sup> The criticism aimed at Utesov, coupled with the popularity he continued to garner in spite of it, clearly indicates that Utesov’s notoriety was not rooted in institutions of power, both before and after the dissolution of RAPM, critics could not agree on what to make of him.

### **Utesov and Soviet Hero-Celebrities**

If the zeitgeist of the Great Break was collective action and the triumph of the “little man” working in tandem with his comrades, the years after 1932 were defined by a shift towards the “vertical, hierarchical ordering” of Socialist Realism.<sup>146</sup> The new figure of the age was the heroic individual who overcame the bounds of scientific possibility to achieve great things. The watchword of the era was “Ever higher.” Overachievers in coal mining (e.g., Aleksei Stakhanov), aviation (Valerii Chkalov), Arctic exploration (Otto Schmidt), and other arenas became new figures of official adoration under Stalin and embodiments of the New Soviet Person. They synthesized the dialectical forces of revolutionary spontaneity and Marxist consciousness to become virtuous heroes, possessing in equal portions the bravery and courage to attempt (and achieve)

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<sup>144</sup> “Estrada i estradnik.”

<sup>145</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 210-211.

<sup>146</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 136.

superhuman feats as well as the moral maturity to keep this heroic energy at bay.<sup>147</sup> This framework helps to explain why such figures were a constant presence in Soviet celebrity culture during the 1930s. These were all figures whom the party-state readily associated with, promoted, and richly rewarded. They were, as one historian summarizes, “essentialized and packaged as iconic figures, reduced to a set of standard Soviet virtues.”<sup>148</sup>

Based on the above description, there is a case to be made for Utesov as an embodiment of this ideal Soviet citizen. He embodied the “relentless optimism” of the 1930s and the humor and up-beat nature of his music could inspire listeners to achieve their own great feats. The best evidence of this is the “March of the Merry Guys”, the opening song from the film of the same name. Though composed by Dunaevskii with lyrics by poet Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach, Utesov claimed to have influenced the creation of this song. Lebedev-Kumach’s original lyrics are predominantly descriptive, featuring an opening stanza about mountains and mist, but Utesov convinced him to re-write it. In the film, the verse and refrain proclaim:

A joyful song is easy on the heart  
It will never bore you  
Such songs are loved in the villages and the countryside  
Such songs are loved in the big city

A song helps us to build and live  
It calls and leads us like a friend  
A person who strides through life with a song

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<sup>147</sup> John McCannon, “Positive Heroes at the Pole: Celebrity Status, Socialist-Realist Ideals and the Soviet Myth of the Arctic, 1932-39,” *Russian Review* 56(3), July 1997, 350.

<sup>148</sup> McCannon, “Positive Heroes,” 359.

Is never lost.<sup>149</sup>

The rendition that Utesov recorded with his orchestra the following year features an additional verse about how songs allow people “to sing and laugh like children” amidst life’s struggles.

Through his repertoire, Utesov also positioned himself as a Soviet patriot. At a time when most Soviet jazz groups included works by British or American jazz artists, Utesov only sang Russian or Soviet compositions in Russian.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, the theme for Utesov’s 1936 concert season was “Songs of Our Motherland” (*Pesni nashei rodiny*) and featured, by his own description, a mix of Soviet compositions and folk arrangements.<sup>151</sup> All of this, Utesov later stated, was part of his ongoing quest to craft a broadly relatable and intelligible musical repertoire.<sup>152</sup>

Despite these characteristics, Utesov does not fit neatly into the template of the ideal Soviet citizen as outlined in Socialist Realism. For one thing, there was little about Utesov that could be construed as heroic in the traditional sense of the term. As a musician and entertainer, he did not engage in any superhuman feats (though some fans certainly regarded his talent as superhuman) and he was not in the business of taming

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<sup>149</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 226. *Legko na serdtse ot pesni veseloi/ Ona skuchat ne daet nikogda/ i liubiat pesniu derevni i sela/ i liubiat pesniu bol'shie goroda/ Nam pesnia stroit' i zhit' pomogaet/ Ona, kak drug, i zovet, i vedet/ I tot, kto s pesnei po zhizni shagaet/ Tot nikogda I nigde ne propadaet.*

<sup>150</sup> Utesov dropped most foreign works from his repertoire in the early 1930s. His group did continue to record foreign instrumental jazz songs, including a 1938 rendition of “Nobody’s Sweetheart”, but Utesov did not sing on these recordings. See “Nobody’s Sweetheart (Vsemi liubimaia), foxtrot,” Russian-Records.com, accessed July 25, 2016, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=12469](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=12469).

<sup>151</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 834, l. 74 (A list of concerts and concert set-lists for Utesov’s jazz orchestra); Utesov, *Spasibo*, 237.

<sup>152</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 237.

nature or achieving technological breakthroughs in his work. Indeed, compared to Stakhanov, aviators, sports figures, ballet dancers, or even classically trained singers like Ivan Kozlovskii, Utesov cut a relatively unspectacular and “everyday” figure.

While audiences responded warmly to Utesov’s more democratic persona, the Soviet leadership was less forthcoming. While Soviet officials scrambled to appear in photographs or at public appearances with hero-celebrities, the regime was frustratingly silent when it came to Utesov for much of the decade. In fact, the only occasion on which Utesov and his orchestra were invited to the Kremlin was not so Utesov himself could be feted, but because the aviator Valerii Chkalov and his crew insisted on having them perform.<sup>153</sup>

Utesov was painfully aware that despite his many years on stage and his popularity, he received little formal recognition from the Soviet leadership.<sup>154</sup> Despite universal acclaim for *The Merry Guys* in the Soviet press, Utesov’s name was left out of most reviews, even in articles that mentioned minor characters in the film. As part of the celebrations of fifteen years of Soviet cinema in 1935, Grigorii Aleksandrov received the Order of the Red Star and Utesov’s co-star Liubov’ Orlova was dubbed an Honored Artist of the Soviet Union. Utesov’s reward was a camera.<sup>155</sup> To add insult to injury, later editions of the film featured a different singer’s voice. It was only when newspapers editors were inundated with letters from irate fans that Soviet film administrators agreed

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<sup>153</sup> Gleb Skorokhodov, *Leonid Utesov: Druz’ia i vragi* (Moskva: Olimp, 2007), 154.

<sup>154</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 34.

<sup>155</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 230-231.

to restore Utesov's voice and even then it was three years until they fulfilled their promise.<sup>156</sup> It was not until 1942, after extensive touring of the frontlines – truly an act of bravery on Utesov's part – that he finally received the title, “Honored Artist of the RSFSR.”

This is not to say that Utesov was unanimously disliked by the regime. It was *he*, after all, who had been approached by Shumiatskii to star in *The Merry Guys*, not the other way around. Furthermore, the Red Army leadership, especially Commissar for Defense Kliment Voroshilov, enjoyed Utesov's music and the orchestra performed several private concerts for the General Staff when they were booked at the Central House of the Red Army theater for the 1936 concert season.<sup>157</sup> After the initial Kremlin concert (at which Utesov's performance of the lyrical “Reflection in the Water” (*Otrazhenie v vode*) is rumored to have brought Stalin to tears), Utesov also occasionally performed for the leadership at its sanatorium outside Moscow and he was recruited by Lazar Kaganovich, the Commissar of Heavy Industry and the other major jazz fan in Stalin's entourage, to help organize a jazz orchestra of railroad workers (Utesov's collaboration with Kaganovich, one of the co-architects of the Terror, would tarnish Utesov's reputation with future generations of Soviet jazz fans).<sup>158</sup> However, most of

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<sup>156</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 231. Utesov does not explain why this decision was made.

<sup>157</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 35. Voroshilov objected to Andrei Zhdanov's description of Utesov as a singer of “criminal songs.” See RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 828, l. 48.

<sup>158</sup> On Utesov and Stalin, see Skorokhodov, *Leonid Utesov*, 154. On Voroshilov and Kaganovich as jazz fans, see Starr, *Red and Hot*, 127. For Utesov's collaboration with Kaganovich, see *Kak organizovat' zheleznodorozhnye ansambli pesni i pliaski i dzhaz-orkestr* (Moskva: Transzheldorizdat, 1939), 67. On Utesov's tarnished reputation, see William Minor, *Unzipped Souls: A Jazz Journey Through the Soviet Union* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 91.

these connections came in the late 1930s, well after Utesov's celebrity status had been cemented.

Despite these connections and his regular performances for Stalin and his associates, Utesov either did not or could not build strong relationships with the Soviet political elite. He did not capitalize on the client-patron networks upon which many artists relied in the Stalin period. There is little evidence that Voroshilov or Kaganovich advocated for Utesov and his causes. Indeed, when Utesov petitioned the Soviet leadership in 1944 to consider *estrada* artists for the prestigious Stalin Prize, he wrote directly to Stalin, not to another member of the leadership as was customary for Soviet artists who had patrons in Stalin's inner circle. The evidence suggests that Stalin did not pay much attention to Utesov's plea and he delegated the issue to Viacheslav Molotov. Utesov's petition was unsuccessful.<sup>159</sup>

The ambivalent nature of Utesov's relationship with the Soviet political establishment is representative of his relationship with the party-state as a whole. Utesov's repertoire, for instance, was scrutinized by a vast censorship regime. It was censors and bureaucrats like Kerzhentsev who had the final say on what songs could be performed, recorded, or published. For example, the "criminal" Odessan songs with which Utesov was so closely identified, disappeared from his repertoire in the mid-1930s. At the time this was depicted as a voluntary artistic choice by Utesov in his never-ending

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<sup>159</sup> Kirill Tomoff, "'Most Respected Comrade...': Patrons, Clients, Brokers and Unofficial Networks in the Stalinist Music World," *Contemporary European History* 11(1), February 2002, 39-40.

pursuit of music that would resonate with his audiences.<sup>160</sup> Later in life, however, Utesov claimed that Kerzhentsev forbade him from performing these songs.<sup>161</sup>

At the same time, Utesov benefited from a lack of uniform cultural policy during the 1930s. This was partially due to the wide range of venues that he and his orchestra performed at. The Maly Opera Theater in Leningrad, where thea-jazz debuted, the Leningrad and Moscow Music Halls, and the various resorts, houses of rest, *estrada* theaters, or even on the cinema screens that dotted the Soviet landscape, were all governed by different bureaucratic structures. While the big theaters like the Hermitage theater in Moscow or the Maly opera theater were under the aegis of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, other venues were run at republic or city level. Resorts and houses of rest were run by the Commissariat of Health and the Red Army ran its own theaters. Each of these agencies had its own agenda and audience it wished to appeal to. Such variations in governance vertically (all-union, republic, city) and laterally (between commissariats) meant that there was considerable bureaucratic overlap, competition for Utesov's services, and difference in how his repertoire was received.

This lack of uniform policy proved particularly irksome to Utesov's early critics. Many of them were as harsh on the state cultural institutions that organized his performance dates, venues, and salary, as they were on Utesov himself. The workers' brigade that had labeled Utesov a plagiarist of the Parisian cabaret also criticized the Moscow Music Hall for allowing him to perform, saying it revived "the worst traditions

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<sup>160</sup> The change in Utesov's repertoire is discussed, for example, in D. Glikhshtein's article for *Bakinskii rabochii* in 1935. See Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 33.

<sup>161</sup> Skorokhodov, *Leonid Utesov*, 154-155.

of the stage.”<sup>162</sup> Another anonymous critic lambasted the agency responsible for popular entertainment at the time, the State Association of Music, Estrada, and Circus (GOMETs), blaming them for allowing such trash on stage. The critic concluded that Soviet *estrada* could not be fully cultivated until GOMETs was reorganized.<sup>163</sup> *Crocodile*, the Communist Party’s satirical journal published a “Soviet Encyclopedia” and defined GOMETs as “A Spanish term for bad Soviet *estrada*.”<sup>164</sup> Such comments indicate that, though the state may not have been functioning on a uniform front, it did play an essential role in furthering Utesov’s career.

It is also important to keep in mind that Utesov was by no means a marginal figure in Soviet culture. Because his career as an actor and entertainer long pre-dated his jazz career, Utesov already had an extensive network of contacts within the Soviet cultural sphere by the 1930s. Some of his closest connections were with the elite literary figures who, like him, had grown up in Odessa, especially Isaak Babel, who wrote the foreword to Utesov’s first autobiography (removed from the final printing after Babel’s arrest in 1939). Other connections such as Dmitri Shostakovich came through his work in musical theater though this particular connection was not always an asset, especially in 1936 when Shostakovich was attacked in 1936 as a formalist. In the end, Utesov became a highly respected and influential figure, but only in the world of *estrada*. That he sat on the jury that decided the winner of the 1939 All-Union Estrada Competition (won by

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<sup>162</sup> Brigada rabkorov, “Dvukh putei ne nado.”

<sup>163</sup> “Estrada i estradnik,” *Sovetskoe iskusstva*, July 20, 1933.

<sup>164</sup> “Krokodil’skaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia”, *Krokodil* 29-30, 1934, 7.



none other than Klavdiia Shul'zhenko, who co-led her own jazz orchestra at the time), is evidence of this fact.<sup>165</sup>

### **Utesov: The People's Choice**

While the Stalinist regime was ambivalent towards Utesov, the same could not be said for Soviet audiences. Utesov was exceedingly well liked by fans from Kiev to Vladivostok and from Alma-Ata to Leningrad and he appealed to young and old listeners throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s. The Soviet press's and Stalinist regime's ambivalent attitudes towards Utesov raise the question of why he was so popular. I argue that, in contrast to the celebrity-heroes described above, Utesov's popularity derived from the belief that he was an approachable, "everyday" figure. By analyzing Utesov's fan mail, I identify particular themes and qualities that resonated with audiences to suggest that for many members of the Soviet general public, Utesov's appeal was precisely because he was perceived to be so everyday. Audiences responded positively to Utesov's public merriment and humor and praised him as a figure who was upbeat and who attempted to spread joy to those around him. They also saw him as someone who, like a friend, would come to their aid when they needed it, whether because of material privation or otherwise. Although not a hero, several fans still understood the ideal citizen as socialist and they engaged with Utesov within the bounds of Bolshevik language and ideology. Overall, audiences saw Utesov as a more democratic, everyday figure who was infinitely more relatable than the superhuman heroes of Socialist Realism. Indeed,

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<sup>165</sup> Irina Vasilinina, *Klavdiia Zhul'zhenko* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1979), 55.

according to one source, it was Utesov's lack of official recognition that so endeared him to fans.<sup>166</sup>

First and foremost, the ideal citizen was upbeat, merry, and tried to spread these feelings to others. Utesov was so closely associated with merriment or jollity (*veselost'*) that for much of the 1930s, his band was colloquially known as "The Merry Guys" in honor of both the film and the mirth they evoked in their concerts.<sup>167</sup> Various fans wrote to Utesov thanking him for the gift of merriment. As one wrote in 1939, Utesov appeared to be "such a good, merry, simple man" and when she heard his voice, she "forgot everything."<sup>168</sup> Another fan wrote an extensive poem in 1937 about an Utesov concert, which described how he came on stage and "infused jollity into all" who were present.<sup>169</sup> "I love people such as you," wrote another, "merry and able to bring merriment to millions of listeners."<sup>170</sup>

The ideal citizen would also provide help to those who needed it. Unlike merriment, which was evident in Utesov's public persona and to which audiences responded, fans believed that Utesov would come to the aid of his fans without clear evidence that he regularly did so. As noted earlier, many fans counted Utesov as a close personal friend, despite only encountering him through mass media or on the stage.

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<sup>166</sup> Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 10, Case 127 (interviewer M.L., type A4). Male, 26, Great Russian, Student. Widener Library, Harvard University.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746, l. 13. (Utesov's fan mail from 1938-1939)

<sup>168</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746, l. 43.

<sup>169</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 745, l. 92. (Utesov's fan mail from 1924-1937)

<sup>170</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746 l. 49.

Some, therefore, asked him, as a friend, to help them escape from undesirable social or professional situations or, more often, to help them acquire material goods. Although there is no evidence that Utesov did in fact help those who asked, the fact that many fans expected this behavior of him suggests that they saw it as an essential character trait.

For many fans who asked Utesov to help them escape from undesired social situations, they sought careers in the music business. Fans asked Utesov for advice on forming or joining orchestras, studying music or, in the most brazen instance, asking if they could join *his* orchestra. One boy, writing from Leningrad in 1935, described his living situation to Utesov, fatherless and with a mother who could only get piecemeal work. He told Utesov he was a competent musician and begged the singer to help him find work in an orchestra.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, a letter from a young woman in Central Asia in 1941 described how she and her father had been in a jazz band together, but her father took off and left her alone and now she wanted to join Utesov's orchestra as a singer.<sup>172</sup>

More frequently, fans turned to Utesov to help them navigate the complications of shortages in a planned economy.<sup>173</sup> One of the major pitfalls of the Soviet economy was the almost constant dearth of goods. This was particularly true in the aftermath of the First Five-Year Plan, which overemphasized heavy industry at the expense of household

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<sup>171</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 745, l. 54.

<sup>172</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 748, l. 18. (Utesov's fan mail from 1941-1942)

<sup>173</sup> Janos Kornai refers to such economies as "supply-constrained" systems because demand frequently outweighs supply, whereas it is the opposite case under capitalism. See Katherine Verdery, "Ethnic relations, economies of shortage, and the transition in Eastern Europe" in *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, ed. by C.M. Hann, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 173.

goods.<sup>174</sup> The acquisition of food or common commodities like clothing, housewares, shoes, and other goods through official channels meant standing in long queues with no guarantee that the goods would even be available. To offset this economy of shortage, Soviet citizens relied heavily upon a combination of black market trade and personal connections (*blat*) to obtain what they needed. Since few people possessed the cash required for the black market was hard to come by for most people, personal connections were essential to survival as evidenced in the popular phrase, “One must not have 100 rubles, but 100 friends.”<sup>175</sup> Many people turned to Utesov for just such connections.

The goods that people sought varied, but were always something they thought it was reasonable for Utesov to get and were related to his work. The most common goods that people sought help acquiring were usually smaller items. One of the most common requests was for tickets – always a hot commodity when Utesov performed.<sup>176</sup> Other fans asked for copies of Utesov’s records. One fan lamented that it was extremely difficult to acquire Utesov’s records in his town. The stores had very few of them and while one could purchase records through *blat* (*po blatu*), the fan had no such connections to exploit. He asked, therefore, if Utesov would help remedy the situation and send him some records.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 42.

<sup>175</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 63.

<sup>176</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 752, ll. 57, 85. (Utesov’s fan mail from 1946)

<sup>177</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 753, l. 71. (Utesov’s fan mail from 1947)

Another common request from participants in amateur jazz orchestras was for sheet music and musical instruments. Although some musicians were able to learn by ear, most needed sheet music for each band member. Unfortunately, sheet music proved difficult to acquire, especially during and immediately after the Great Patriotic War, the period during which most surviving letters detailing the troubles of finding sheet music were written. One fan wrote requesting songs because, after searching in Odessa, Moscow, and Leningrad, he found no decent sheet music.<sup>178</sup> Many others, while not specifying shortages elsewhere wrote to request song lyrics and sheet music.<sup>179</sup> Some fans also asked Utesov to help them find instruments or parts. During the Second World War, a soldier asked Utesov to help him find a reed for his alto saxophone since he had a concert coming up and the regular channels for such supplies were unresponsive.<sup>180</sup> In the postwar years, Utesov even received requests from prisoners who wanted instruments to play in their orchestras (though they do not mention his connection with prison songs as inspiration for such requests).<sup>181</sup> The fact so many fans approached Utesov for help indicates that coming to the aid of those in need, especially those considered friends, was seen as a desirable characteristic of the ideal citizen.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746, l. 23.

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746, l. 47; and RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 748, l. 42.

<sup>180</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 749, l. 16.

<sup>181</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 757, l. 76. (Utesov's fan mail from the second half of 1949)

<sup>182</sup> To be sure, there were those who approached Utesov not necessarily for help, but for gain. There are at least two letters that threaten harm if Utesov does not give money and others that seek Utesov's help, but without the supplicatory language of a "request" (*pros'ba*). See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 746, l. 5.

While some of the traits that fans admired in or ascribed to Utesov fell outside of the Socialist Realist framework, fans still engaged with his persona in a political manner. Their choice of language was class-conscious and they interpreted Utesov within the context of class struggle, though it is unclear how strongly they identified with such language. Before a concert, Utesov received a note from three factory workers who sent him, an “authentic proletarian artist,” their greetings and said that they would not give him flowers because this was a bourgeois gesture.<sup>183</sup> Another amusing anecdote, which Utesov included in his first memoir, featured a critical letter from a fifteen-year old girl for whom Utesov and Kostia, his character from *The Merry Guys*, were synonymous:

Dear comrade Utesov, you are to be congratulated for growing from a shepherd to become a director and musician. This is very good. But there is one thing that I cannot forgive. How could you, a shepherd, a man of proletarian persuasion manage to fall in love with Elena? You see, she’s bourgeois! But that Aniuta is a working girl and she has a magnificent voice. Elena really cannot sing, but croaks. This is your serious mistake.”

Sensibly, Utesov agreed. “You’re right, Natasha,” he responded, “but I believe this is the fault of the script writer.”<sup>184</sup>

Another way that some fan interpretations of Utesov dovetailed with popular understandings of Bolshevism was in their understanding of Utesov’s nationality. One of the major cultural trends of the 1930s was the transition from multi-nationalism to a more homogenous “Soviet” national culture that became synonymous with Russian culture, a

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<sup>183</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo*, 345.

<sup>184</sup> Leonid Utesov, *Zapiski aktera* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1939), 144.

process that some scholars have labelled “national Bolshevism.”<sup>185</sup> This phenomenon can be seen in some of the audience responses to Utesov. Though Utesov was a Jew from the far-flung entrepôt of Odessa, some fans saw him as a specifically *Russian* public figure. One fan wrote to Utesov in April 1941 to say that there were three people whom he idolized: Lenin, Pushkin, and Utesov. The fan’s admiration for Lenin, he wrote, was obvious. He idealized Pushkin because he was “the father of Russian literature and language” and he idealized Utesov because he was the “founder and creator of jazz in Russia – [which is] now the USSR”.<sup>186</sup> A similar letter came from a “true Russian man” in Tomsk in 1945, who thanked “the Russian earth” for giving them Utesov and his music, which he ranked alongside Gogol, Pushkin, and Gorkii as a national figure worth admiration.<sup>187</sup> Other fans were less sure of Utesov’s nationality. He received one letter from a group of students who asked him to settle a dispute among them as to what his nationality actually was.<sup>188</sup> While this was not an especially common phenomenon in Utesov’s fan mail, it is indicative of the influence of “national Bolshevism” upon his audience. Intriguingly, no one brought attention to Utesov’s Jewishness, despite his

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<sup>185</sup> This phenomenon is discussed at length by several historians. See, for example, Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>186</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 748, l. 14.

<sup>187</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 751, l. 44. (Utesov’s fan mail from 1945) What is intriguing about this letter and the one from note 90, is that nearly all of the figures mentioned besides Utesov had equally and perhaps more complex ethnic backgrounds with Lenin, Pushkin, and Gogol, all possessing some non-Russian ethnicity in their lineage (Turkic, African, and Cossack, respectively).

<sup>188</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 753, l. 101.

associations with Odessan criminal songs and Jewish themes in songs like “Jewish Rhapsody” early in his career and “Uncle Elia” later in the decade or the fact that he explicitly identified himself as Jewish in his 1939 autobiography. One possible explanation is simply that, because Utesov did not perform songs like “Jewish Rhapsody” and the Odessan songs during the middle and latter portion of the decade, most fans associated him with his later work, which was less overtly Jewish. Another possibility is that because Utesov sang almost exclusively in Russian, most listeners automatically assumed he was ethnically Russian. Still another possibility is that, like many Jews in the Soviet Union, being Jewish meant abandoning the pre-revolutionary markers of Jewishness and adopting the mantle of Russianness.

This summary of Utesov’s early fan mail indicates prominent themes that Soviet audiences identified with the great jazz singer. The collective image of a cheerful, politically conscious, and friendly figure who would help those in need shares some similarities with the Socialist Realist heroes of the 1930s, but is far more down-to-earth, approachable, and intelligible. While Soviet citizens did not reject the hero-celebrities elevated by the state, the most prominent celebrity they did “pick” by consensus stands in stark contrast to much of the Stalinist pantheon and provides a model for how many people thought that Soviet citizens should think, behave, and interact with one another. In this way, applying recent celebrity culture theory to the Soviet context can be a fruitful way of better understanding the negotiated relationship between elites and audiences in popular culture, specifically, and how Soviet society functioned, generally.



## Conclusion

As Utesov's band travelled to the Kremlin to perform for Chkalov's aviators and Stalin's entourage in 1937, Utesov turned to Arkadii Kotliarskii, his saxophonist, and said in a put-on, thick Yiddish accent, "How could I have ever imagined that I, a Jew from Odessa, would find myself in the Hall of Facets [the erstwhile banqueting hall of the Muscovite tsars and venue for their concert], and even singing there!"<sup>189</sup> Utesov recognized the significance of his circumstances: a member of an ethnic minority had made his way to the epicenter of Russian and Soviet power by performing an imported musical form. This would have been a near-impossibility under the tsarist regime that Utesov was born into. The sentiment that Utesov expressed reflects Theodor Adorno's theory that celebrities represent the (supposed) democratic possibility of modern society by propagating the belief that hard work brings fame and acclaim.<sup>190</sup>

Certainly, Utesov's proverbial road to the top was laden with obstacles. He began his jazz career at an inopportune moment, and, for much of his early career, he endured the slings and arrows of RAPM and other anti-jazz critics during the years of cultural revolution. Even in the years after, he still received sharp criticism in the Soviet press. Despite these pressures, Utesov continued to perform, develop his art, and publicly advocate for jazz as a valuable component of Soviet entertainment culture. It was not until the middle of the decade, especially after *The Merry Guys* became a smash hit across the Soviet Union, that Utesov's work went largely unchallenged by cultural elites.

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<sup>189</sup> Kotliarskii, *Spasibo dzhazu!*, 36.

<sup>190</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, "The Culture Industry."

Utesov's struggles for artistic legitimacy were compounded by the Soviet regime's silence regarding his fame and his work. At a time when party-state leaders rushed to elevate and associate with hero-celebrities like Stakhanovites and aviators – figures whose celebrity personae reinforced the values of Socialist Realism – these same leaders did little to publicly recognize Utesov's accomplishments, even though they may have privately admired him. This public reticence towards Utesov on the part of the Soviet regime, even though he performed for them regularly, suggests that they delayed publicly recognizing and honoring him as long as possible because they did not want to condone his public persona.

The years of criticism and state ambivalence that Utesov endured only serve to underscore the role that mass Soviet audiences played in his rise to fame. To be sure, Utesov benefited from his connections with Soviet cultural elites, but he primarily owed his fame and notoriety to the Soviet audiences with whom his public persona resonated. They went to his concerts, bought his records, listened to him on the radio, and wrote to express their admiration of him. In doing so, these audiences utilized the Soviet jazz public sphere to elevate Utesov as an alternative conception of the ideal Soviet citizen that was simpler and more everyday than aviators or polar explorers. This citizen was joyful, upbeat, and willing to come to the aid of those in need, all while still being a good socialist. While this public sphere's consensus on Utesov hardly compensated for the overwhelming monopoly of power that the regime had, it does show that Soviet citizens did not simply adopt the cultural frameworks presented to them by elites.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Internationalism, Cosmopolitanism, Multinationalism, and the Search for “Authentic” Soviet Jazz

#### Introduction

In the climactic scene of the 1936 film *Circus (Tsirk)*, the nefarious German antagonist Franz von Kneishitze reveals to the Moscow circus audience that his ward, the American performer Marion Dixon, played by Liubov' Orlova, has mothered a black child. Although Dixon fears that her career (and blossoming love life) are over, her German boss/blackmailer is confounded when the audience reacts in a nonplussed manner. Ludwig, the circus director explains that, in the USSR, the color of one's skin means nothing and that there are no qualms about interracial relationships. When the baby begins to cry, he is cooed to sleep by several different audience members singing in different languages of the Soviet peoples, the last one being an unnamed African-American tenor who sings in Russian.<sup>191</sup> This scene then transitions to the rousing finale “Song of the Motherland”, one of the most well-known mass songs of the Stalin period.

This excerpt from *Circus* neatly summarizes three broad currents that ran through Soviet culture during the 1930s. The story that a white woman could have a black child and still be welcome in the Soviet Union emphasized the country's putative internationalist disregard for race and, implicitly, a criticism of American racism towards blacks (and, because Dixon's antagonist is German, of Nazi anti-Semitism and anti-Slavism). It was class that was important, after all, not race. The fact that the child is

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<sup>191</sup> Among those to sing the lullaby were the Jewish singers and actors Solomon Mikhoels and Lev Sverdlin as well as the Georgian singer Vladimir Kandelaki, who led a vocal jazz ensemble.

lulled to sleep in multiple languages likewise accentuated the multi-national character of the Soviet Union. The musical score itself was composed by the classically-trained Soviet composer Isaak Dunaevskii using Western symphonic musical forms, which indicates that the Soviet musical community, for all that it embraced its indigenous cultures, also admired aspects of Western culture and sought to appropriate them for its own ends.

This overlap of internationalism, domestic multi-nationalism, and what Katerina Clark labels “cosmopolitan patriotism” was a major component of Soviet jazz music and a constant theme in its public sphere during the 1930s.<sup>192</sup> Composers, musicians, musicologists, bureaucrats, and journalists all grappled with jazz music’s western roots and the extent to which this foreign influence should be adopted, adapted, or rejected by the Soviet musical community. Debates about whether or how to reconcile jazz to Soviet society played out in the pages of the Soviet press, in meetings of the Composers’ Union, and in the songs that jazz musicians performed. The result was a broad conversation, sometimes explicit and sometimes implied, about how the Soviet Union should relate to the West and how it should relate to its own multi-ethnic population.

Scholars vary in how they depict Stalinist attitudes toward internationalism, multi-nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. The émigré sociologist Nicholas Timasheff famously framed Stalinism as a “great retreat” from the radical revolutionary program of Lenin and the early Bolsheviks. One salient example of this process, Timasheff argues, was the shift away from socialist internationalism to Russian nationalism. He states that, prior to 1934, the Bolsheviks downplayed the importance of national or ethnic identity,

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<sup>192</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 30. “Cosmopolitan patriotism” will be explained below.

citing Marx's claim that "proletarians have no fatherland."<sup>193</sup> This policy shifted dramatically in 1934 when the Soviet state enacted severe penalties for those found guilty of "treason against the nation" rather than against socialism or the revolution. In the following decade, a series of other measures marked the retreat into Russian nationalism. Histories of pre-revolutionary Russia, for example, which had previously been regarded as a mere prelude to 1917, now lionized great figures of the tsarist past such as Peter I and Catherine II. At the same time, the Bolsheviks selectively promoted great appreciation for pre-revolutionary Russian culture through monuments and festivals dedicated to great Russian writers of the past, especially the poet Aleksandr Pushkin, even though few of these writers would have sympathized with Bolshevism. This aspect of the Great Retreat culminated in the abandonment of "The International" as the Soviet anthem in favor of a new "Hymn of the Soviet Union" in 1944<sup>194</sup>

Recently, scholars have reassessed Timasheff's thesis from the perspective of the Soviet Union's relationship with its non-Russian populations. Terry Martin argues that the Soviet Union could never fully embrace proletarian internationalism because of Russia's imperial legacy. Since non-Russian national minorities had been subjected to Russification campaigns under the Russian Empire, they were likely to interpret Marxism's disregard of national identity, coupled with the fact that Soviet power was still centered in Russia itself, as an excuse for further Russification. Instead, during the 1920s, the Bolsheviks created an "affirmative-action empire" which nurtured non-Russian

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<sup>193</sup> Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1946), 165.

<sup>194</sup> Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*, 165-181.

indigenous cultures and elites while maintaining centralized administrative power in Moscow. The Bolsheviks theorized that by embracing nationalism, something that would have affronted Marx, they would undercut any counter-revolutionary nationalist movement and the non-Russian populations would, gradually, amalgamate into one Soviet nationality.

Martin, like Timasheff, observes that a shift occurred during the early 1930s. The Soviet leadership rehabilitated Russian culture and Russian replaced indigenous languages as the primary language of administration in most Soviet republics for two reasons: discontent from Russian communists and because of concern that nationally conscious Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Poles might try to communicate with these ethnic groups outside Soviet territory. The shift, therefore, derived from a combination of neo-imperialism and pragmatic state security concerns. However, Martin notes, this did not mean a total abandonment of non-Russian “indigenization” (*korenizatsiia*) campaigns, in which ethnic minorities were encouraged to develop and study their own languages and cultures. Rather than seeing nationality as a transitional phase in the development of socialism, it was portrayed as a primordial trait and the Soviet Union was depicted as a “Brotherhood of Nations,” with Russia as the undisputed bigger brother of the family.<sup>195</sup>

Francine Hirsch counters that these pro-minority policies and the shift to Russian nationalism were both subsidiary to the ultimate project of proletarian internationalism.

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<sup>195</sup> Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. by Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67-82. These arguments are fleshed out more fully in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

She states that the Bolsheviks engaged in “state-sponsored evolutionism” where “underdeveloped” ethnic groups were grouped into official cultures, territories, and languages in an effort to accelerate the Soviet population “along a Marxist timeline of historical development: to transform feudal-era clans and tribes into nationalities, and nationalities into socialist-era nations—which, at some point in the future, would merge together under communism.”<sup>196</sup> In this sense, then, national “indigenization” and even Russification were part of a broader scheme of proletarian and revolutionary internationalism.

Katerina Clark suggests an alternative arena of analysis on the question of (multi-) nationalism and internationalism. Clark argues that “the causes of nationalism, internationalism, and even cosmopolitanism were not distinct but to a significant degree imbricated with each other” during the 1930s.<sup>197</sup> At the same time that “policies toward the national minorities shifted and Russian was stressed as the national language, . . . the Soviet cultural world became more cosmopolitan, more open to products from the West.”<sup>198</sup> Clark argues that the proletarian internationalism of the 1920s was replaced by “cosmopolitan patriotism” in which Soviet cultural elites, especially litterateurs, sought out what they saw as the best aspects of European and, to a lesser extent, American culture and art. Clark labels this selective borrowing of Western culture the “Great

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<sup>196</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 8-9.

<sup>197</sup> Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet culture, 1931-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>198</sup> Clark, *The Fourth Rome*, 16.

Appropriation.”<sup>199</sup> These elites “reinflected” western culture through the prism of Marxism-Leninism to create a new “world culture” that emanated from Soviet Moscow and would be, they believed, superior to all other cultures. This phenomenon, Clark argues, was reminiscent of the ancient Roman adaptation of Greek culture in order to project a sense of cultural sophistication and superiority over the rest of its empire (Clark even refers to Stalin’s Moscow as “The Fourth Rome”).<sup>200</sup> This “Great Appropriation” of European culture was meant to both edify the Soviet population and prove the Soviet Union’s superiority over the rest of the world.

Soviet jazz music and culture falls within and between each of these interpretations. Jazz musicians, like most other musicians in the Soviet Union, drew upon what they saw as the best aspects of Western culture in hopes that it would attract Soviet audiences. The problem, however, was that some cultural elites resented jazz’s mass popularity and were deeply suspicious of the genre, especially its connections with “low” bourgeois culture and its supposed non-musicality. To counter this criticism, jazz musicians and advocates argued, to varying degrees, that jazz could be reinflected through internationalist, (multi-)nationalist, and cosmopolitan language. By highlighting and accentuating jazz’s roots in the culture of an oppressed people – African Americans – the genre’s supporters could depict foreign or foreign sounding jazz songs as an expression of international solidarity with American blacks, even if such songs had no connection to African American culture whatsoever. Others argued that jazz musicians could, like Clark’s cosmopolitans, look to the legacy of European and pre-revolutionary

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<sup>199</sup> Clark, *The Fourth Rome*, 8.

<sup>200</sup> Clark, *The Fourth Rome*, 21.



Russian classical music and use it to elevate Soviet jazz to a higher form than that found in the West. Finally, some argued that truly authentic (*podlinnyi*) jazz could only emerge if Soviet jazz artists adapted the genre to the Soviet Union's many national folk traditions. In reality, musicians wove each of these interpretations of Soviet jazz into their repertoires. Most groups played a mix of foreign jazz songs (often labeled as "negro" songs), mass songs and/or classical works in a symphonic jazz style, and folk themes and melodies arranged for jazz instrumentation and rhythms.

The overlap and interplay between each of these approaches to jazz on the part of both musicians and critics suggests that there was no clear-cut understanding of how the Soviet Union and its culture were supposed to relate to the West. Jazz amplified this problem and forced cultural elites, musicians, and, to a lesser extent, audiences to come up with their own answers to these essential questions.

### **Internationalism and Jazz: "Negro" and Exotic**

As noted in Chapter One, many critics argued that jazz was an inherently lowborn art form that corrupted audiences. They asserted that because jazz was born in the bars, saloons, and brothels of American cities, jazz was inseparable from American drinking culture. Musicologist and historian Mikhail Druskin, for example, stated that the most influential descendent of jazz was ragtime. Ragtime, he argued, was only peripherally connected to African-American culture and was primarily a product of the "lumpenproletariat streets of the big capitalist cities," and could be heard in American

“restaurants and cafes, port taverns, and bars.”<sup>201</sup> Thus, according to Druskin, jazz derived not only from degenerate places, but also the lumpenproletariat – the sector of the working class that Marx theorized would never achieve class consciousness. Other critics also pointed to jazz’s connections with alcohol to denigrate the genre. When Boris Shumiatskii, deputy head of the Committee on Arts Affairs, head of the Soviet film industry, and the man who recruited Utesov to star in *The Merry Guys*, defended jazz music as a genuinely popular form of music in the Soviet Union, the composers A. Berlin and A. Broun scoffed in the pages of *Izvestiia* that the “people” to whom Shumiatskii was referring must have been the frequenters of “Western European and American taverns and bars.”<sup>202</sup> The Bolsheviks had been actively trying to fight alcoholism in its population for years and some moralists were concerned that jazz would thwart this campaign.

Critics were wary of jazz not only for its connection to alcohol and bourgeois drinking culture, but also, as noted in Chapter One, because of its relationship with bourgeois forms of dancing. The fact that observers referred to American and European-style jazz as “western dancing music” instead of “jazz,” emphasizes the connection they saw between the two. Critics distrusted jazz because of the control (or lack thereof) it seemed to exert over the human body. When discussing jazz songs specifically, critics often used pseudo-medical terminology. The genre was depicted as having particular control over neurological functions. Jazz music was described as, “epileptic,” “convulsive” or “nervous”. One member of the Leningrad Composers Union said in 1937

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<sup>201</sup> Mikhail Druskin, “U istokov dzhaza,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, August 17, 1935.

<sup>202</sup> Berlin and Broun, “Eshche o dzhaze i simfonicheskoi muzyke,” *Izvestiia*, December 1, 1936.

that western jazz music could “tickle the nerves” and stimulate the body to move.<sup>203</sup>

Surprisingly, though, there are fewer criticisms of it from a sexual standpoint, though they certainly exist.<sup>204</sup> At any rate, there was a prominent belief that European and American jazz had an undesirable effect on Soviet bodies that was too risky to allow.

These sociological arguments against foreign jazz were critical since, of the more than two dozen Soviet jazz repertoires from the late 1930s and early 1940s that survive in the *Glavrepertkom* (the state censorship committee) archive, nearly all of them feature at least one song that is foreign in origin or subject matter.<sup>205</sup> Works by the American saxophone virtuoso Rudi Weidof and English bandleader Ray Noble, for example, can be found in numerous set lists. The lyrics for many of these songs (if they had lyrics) are unknown, but many groups performed songs that originated in or contained subject-matter about non-Soviet locales.

While Soviet performances of foreign jazz could be exotic experiences that took audiences to several parts of the globe, they could also be interpreted as expressions of proletarian solidarity. The strongest evidence of the connection between proletarian internationalism and Soviet jazz lies in the relationship between the genre and African American culture. From its beginnings, the Soviet Union used the racial discrimination of

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<sup>203</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, l. 44. (Transcript of discussion about jazz in the Leningrad Union of Composers, 18-19 January, 1937)

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, “Luchshe otdykhat’, chtoby luchshe rabotat’,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 14, 1933.

<sup>205</sup> The censors were disappointingly tacit in their notations on these repertoires. Their marginalia consist of little more than punctuation, crossed out stanzas or words, and a simple “approved” or “forbidden” at the top of the song or set list. Soviet censors left little indication of their feelings, good or bad, about Soviet jazz songs. A typical example of this lack of censorial input can be found in the censorship records for Boris Renskii’s repertoire from 1936-1939: RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4797.

American blacks as a bludgeon to criticize the United States, saying that racism was an integral component of capitalist society and that Marxism rejected race as a principle of social organization. Soviet anti-racist overtures and promises of racial equality drew many African-Americans to visit or live in Soviet territory during the 1920s and 30s.<sup>206</sup> Some of these African-Americans were fellow travelers who, while not strictly communist, sympathized with the Soviet project and the idea of a revolutionary renewal of society in the name of equality. Others were technical workers like Robert Robinson who were recruited by the Soviets to come and contribute to the First and Second Five-Year Plans. However, unlike the African-American community in Paris, the diaspora in the Soviet Union, even in Moscow and Leningrad, remained small and not particularly influential.

Many Soviet critics theorized that there was an essentially “negro” style of jazz that was distinct from the “western dancing music” they remained wary of. In one defense of jazz in *Pravda*, Boris Shumiatskii clarified that “when talking about jazz, I mean authentic negro jazz, not tavern [jazz].”<sup>207</sup> The musicologist and historian Pavel Vul’fius made a similar claim when he stated that jazz developed out of African-American culture, but was perverted by the influence of bourgeois salon/restaurant/café/bar culture.<sup>208</sup> To emulate genuine “negro” jazz was to skirt the

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<sup>206</sup> Homer Smith, *Black Man in Red Russia: A Memoir* (Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing Co., 1964); Robert Robinson, *Black on Red: My 44 Years Inside the Soviet Union: An Autobiography* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1988); Maksim Matusevich, *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007); Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds, & Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).

contaminating influence of capitalism and alcoholism and cultivate a truly admirable art form.

Aside from the *Chocolate Kiddies* and Benny Peyton's Jazz Kings, who toured big Soviet cities in the mid-1920s, there were few notable African-American (let alone American) groups that toured the Soviet Union during the Stalin period and the Soviet jazz scene featured far fewer black performers than its western European counterparts. Henry Scott, who had come to study at School of the Toilers of the East (KUTVA), a training school for foreign communists, built a moderately successful career as a dancer and guitarist in Aleksandr Tsfasman's orchestra.<sup>209</sup> He began performing at the Metropole Hotel in 1933 with Tsfasman's orchestra (known at the time as "The Metropole Boys" according to the Moscow daily newspaper, *Vecherniaia Moskva*).<sup>210</sup> Langston Hughes, writing for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, stated that Scott took a central role in the band's performances dancing, playing guitar, and occasionally conducting the group "a la Cab Calloway" and that his performance was warmly received by a packed house.<sup>211</sup> Scott left the Soviet Union in 1938.<sup>212</sup>

The highest profile African-American performer in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, was the singer Celestine Cole. According to *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, Cole was born in 1909 in Dallas, Texas, where her father worked for the Hupp Motor Car factory. She began to sing at a young age and was trained at black colleges in Marshall, Texas and in

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<sup>209</sup> Carew, *Blacks, Reds, & Russians*, 40-41.

<sup>210</sup> *Vecherniaia Moskva*, January 30, 1933.

<sup>211</sup> Langston Hughes, "Russia Night Life Features Negro Artists", *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 4, 1933.

<sup>212</sup> Carew, *Blacks, Reds, & Russians*, 41.

Detroit. At the invitation of Robert Robinson, a fellow former resident of Detroit, Cole came to the Soviet Union in 1934.<sup>213</sup>

Her first performance was at the Central House of the Red Army (TsDKA) park, where she was backed by Aleksandr Varlamov, one of the most respected bandleaders in Moscow, and his orchestra. Critic Viktor Ermans regarded her performance as “the jewel” of the entire season at the TsDKA and possibly in all of Moscow.<sup>214</sup> Over the course of the decade, she toured with a variety of jazz groups and her repertoire included both American jazz standards like “Dinah,” and “On the Sunny Side of the Street” as well as Isaak Dunaevskii’s mass song, “Song about the Motherland.”<sup>215</sup> Her performances consistently received positive reviews in the Soviet press. The Armenian newspaper *Kommunist* regarded her “light and free singing of unpretentious songs” the saving grace of the Leningrad Jazz-Capella’s 1935 performance in Erevan.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, *Pravda-*

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<sup>213</sup> Viktor Ermans, “Tselestina Kool”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, August 11, 1935. There are suspicious aspects of this biography that suggest that Cole’s life story was edited to make it more “proletarian” for Soviet readers. For example, the story claims that Cole came from a working-class family in Texas, but Hupp automobiles (“*Khopmobiles*” in Russian) were manufactured in Detroit, not Dallas. Unfortunately, there are few sources that can corroborate or disprove this story. The Moscow correspondent for the *Baltimore Afro-American* simply referred to Cole as “a Harlem girl”, but did state that prior to touring the Soviet Union, she performed in Harlem and on Broadway – hardly the “big New York theaters” that *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* boasted of, but performances nonetheless. See William N. Jones, “Red Russia Going Big for Harlem Hotcha”, *Afro-American*, September 21, 1935.

<sup>214</sup> Viktor Ermans, “Estradnik i zritel’: v estradnykh teatrakh ‘Ermitazh’ i TsDKA”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, June 11, 1934. Later that year, Cole recorded two songs with Varlamov’s orchestra: “Zheltaia roza” (Yellow Rose) and “Lolla bai” (Lullaby). Though the titles were Russian, Cole sang in English. See, for example, “Yellow Rose (*Zheltaia roza*), waltz,” Russian-records.com, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=9969](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=9969).

<sup>215</sup> RGALI f 656, op. 3, d. 4806, l. 3. (Repertoires of Celestine Cole and Otto Skutetskii’s Czechoslovakian Jazz Revue and Aleksandr Tsfasman’s Jazz Orchestra, submitted to Glavrepertkom, 1937).

<sup>216</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 112.

*Vostoka* singled out Cole's singing as worthy of "honorable recognition".<sup>217</sup> Between 1934 and 1938 (after which her fate is unknown), Cole performed in many Soviet cities including Leningrad, Rostov-on-Don, Baku, Tbilisi, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, and Irkutsk.<sup>218</sup>

Despite the presence of African-Americans like Scott and Cole, Soviet jazz was a white phenomenon and African-American influences on Soviet jazz existed primarily in the songs that jazz groups played. Based upon existing recordings and archived jazz repertoires, songs by African-American composers were known, but not widespread. The most well-known and respected African-American jazz figure was Duke Ellington and more than a half-dozen of his songs could be found in jazz repertoires and recordings of Soviet jazz groups from the 1930s, including the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR, Leonid Utesov and Aleksandr Tsfasman's groups, and several lesser-known artists such as Boris Rachevskii and S.Kh. Samoilov.<sup>219</sup> Some groups covered songs like "Showboat Shuffle" (published as "*Po volnu*" in Russian) and "Best Wishes," but "Caravan," Ellington and Juan Tizol's famous, exotic musical image of the Sahara, was the most popular Ellington number.<sup>220</sup> Ellington's songs were not only popular, but he was also one of the few American jazz composers (along with George Gershwin) who garnered

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<sup>217</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 115.

<sup>218</sup> Ermans, "Tselestina Kool"; RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4806, l. 7 ob.

<sup>219</sup> See for example, RGALI f. 656 op. 3, dd. 4775, 4782, 4785, 4796. (Repertoires for the jazz orchestras of Henrikh Vars, the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR, the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra, and B.M. Rachevskii).

<sup>220</sup> "Russian-records.com>Search>Эллингтон," Russian-records.com, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://russian-records.com/search.php>.

respect from the Soviet musical community. Dunaevskii repeatedly pointed to him as one of the few western jazz composers from whom Soviet composers could learn something valuable about jazz.<sup>221</sup> That said, Ellington was not a universally admired figure. One radio listener sent a letter to the All-Union Radio Committee complaining that Aleksandr Tsfasman's music was sounding more and more like Ellington's work.<sup>222</sup> Leonid Volkov-Lannit also lamented how some jazz musicians seemed to want to become the "Soviet Ellington," which he argued made them no better than the moralists who thought only symphonies deserved a place in Soviet music.<sup>223</sup>

While Soviet jazz artists occasionally employed works by African-American artists, others used allusions to "negro" culture to legitimize their song choices, even if the songs were not of African-American origin. Ellington's works were far from the only western jazz songs to appear in Soviet jazz. Several orchestras performed standards like "St. Louis Blues", "Tiger Rag" (*Okhota na tigra* in Russian), "Diga Diga Do", and "Sweet Sue, Just You." What is particularly notable about these songs is that, in the Glavrepertkom repertoire lists, they are identified not as "American" or "British," but as "negro" foxtrots, rhapsodies, or lullabies. Mikhail Grossman's jazz band listed the 1925 jazz standard "Dinah" as a "negro" foxtrot, even though the song's composer and lyricists were all white.<sup>224</sup> Reviewing a performance by A.N. Semenov's Leningrad Jazz

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<sup>221</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, l. 35. He repeated this statement again in an article for *Muzyka*. See Isaak Dunaevskii, "Sovetskomu dzhazu – novyi repertuar," *Muzyka*, March 6, 1937.

<sup>222</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 54, l. 19. (Review written by Soviet radio listeners, 1940).

<sup>223</sup> V.B. Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR: Po stranitsam pečati, 1922-1940 gg.* (Leningrad: Samizdat, 1972), 17.

<sup>224</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4786, l. 3. (Repertoires for the jazz orchestras of M.I. Grossman and Guriaeva, 1938)



Orchestra, Ol'ga Shchepillo noted that Semenov's group did a particularly good interpretation of "Tiger Rag" "[by] the negro composer Ray Noble." Either Semenov or Shchepillo (or both) was unaware that "Tiger Rag" was originally recorded by the all-white Original Dixieland Jazz Band (though it, like "Dinah" had been recorded several times by black artists) or that Ray Noble was a white British jazz composer.<sup>225</sup>

Soviet jazz artists also emphasized the connection between jazz and black culture in their own compositions as well. Sometimes these compositions emphasize the plight of blacks under the yoke of capitalist racism. Boris Renskii's thea-jazz orchestra, for example, regularly included a song "Negro Joe," inspired by the Vladimir Mayakovskii poem "Black and White" (*Blek end uait*), about a disillusioned black man who forms a jazz band.<sup>226</sup> Leonid Utesov followed suit when, in May 1935, he starred in a revue called *The Dark Spot* (*Temnoe piatno*). In this revue, he played a black musician who, fed up with perpetual unemployment and hardship in the United States, forms a jazz band and takes it to Germany where he faces continued hardship and hatred because of his color.<sup>227</sup> Utesov stated at the time that the play was meant to show the "outrageousness of fascist racial theory and the vileness of its defenders," though most of the audience likely came for Utesov and the jazz rather than for the ideology.<sup>228</sup> In most cases, however, allusions

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<sup>225</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 118. There is considerable dispute within the jazz community about whether the ODJB were in fact the authors of "Tiger Rag". Ray Noble was an especially popular composer among Soviet jazz musicians.

<sup>226</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 66.

<sup>227</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 30. There are no photographs of Utesov in this role, but it is very likely that he and his band performed in blackface.

<sup>228</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 30.

to black culture were far less overtly political. I.I. Krutianskii's group performed a song simply called "Negro Stomp."<sup>229</sup> Aleksandr Tsfasman similarly wrote his own "Negro Fox" ("fox" being short for "foxtrot") and "Negro Holiday".<sup>230</sup>

Although Soviet jazz artists highlighted jazz's roots in black culture to defend and legitimize the genre, they often exoticized blacks in the process. Most Soviet citizens had never seen a black person and even fewer were aware of the differences between Africans and African-Americans (they were, after all, both victims of capitalist-imperialist oppression). Indeed, the fact that music and songs were referred to as "negro" rather than "Afro-American" or "African" implies that for most Soviet citizens, there was no differentiation between black-skinned people; they all came from Africa. Indeed, when the black intellectual Harry Haywood visited a village not far from Moscow, he was surprised at the lack of knowledge the residents possessed about blacks and they asked questions about why his skin was so dark, his teeth so white, and so on.<sup>231</sup>

This ignorance and unconscious racism is evident in many "negro" jazz songs written by Soviet composers. Sometimes, when Soviet songwriters attempted to incorporate African-American motifs into their music, they betrayed their own misconceptions about African-Americans in the process. Numerous Soviet-penned "bliuz" (blues), "trots", and "rumbas" (rhumbas) mention Africa while none mention the American South. Aleksandr Riazanov's Vocal Jazz Quartet, for example, performed a

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<sup>229</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 1, d. 4794, l. 14. (Repertoires for the jazz orchestras of L.M. Kunin and I.I. Krutianskii, 1938-1940)

<sup>230</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 1, d. 4806, l. 16.

<sup>231</sup> Carew, *Blacks, Reds, Russians*, 38.

song simply called “Negro Melody”, which featured lyrics about the Congo River and how happy life was there among the wildlife, including monkeys and tigers.<sup>232</sup> Several other artists performed songs about the jungle or Africa including Leonid Utesov and the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra.<sup>233</sup> In another example, more grating to modern ears, Vladimir Kandelaki’s vocal jazz group, *Dzhaz-Gol* (Jazz Voice), performed a “Negro lullaby” with the following lyrics:

Sleep, my weepy baby, my little one dark as shoe polish...  
Sleep, my barefooted one, after all, you’re such a snub-nose,  
That they see the sky in all its beauty through the two holes in your nose  
Sleep, la la la la, may you dream of paradise,  
Hundreds of gentle gorillas and tender crocodiles  
May hippos, lions, and tigers play games with you in your dreams.<sup>234</sup>

Though songwriters and performers likely engaged with these themes more out of naivety than malicious racism, the repeated implication that blacks are inseparable from Africa – where they live in savagery among other wild animals – is nevertheless revealing about popular Soviet attitudes towards black people and how they conflicted with Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Of course, just because bands connected their music to African or African-American culture did not necessarily mean that all critics would be accepting of their

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<sup>232</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4777, l. 11. (Repertoire for A. Riazanov’s Vocal Jazz Quartet, 1938-1941)

<sup>233</sup> For Utesov, see RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 745, l. 67. For the BSSR Jazz Orchestra, see RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4781, l. 15.

<sup>234</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4780, l. 2-3. (Repertoire for Jazz-Gol, 1937-1941). *Spi, moi plaska, moi chernen’kii kak vaksa...Spi, moi bosyi, ved’ ty takoi kurnosyi, chto vidiat v nebe vsiu krasu – dve dyrohki v nosu. Spi, lia, lia, lia, lia, bai, pust’ tebe prisnitsia rai, sotni laskovykh gorill i nezhnyi krokodil. Pust’ vo sne s toboi sateiut igry begemoty, l’vy i tigry.*

music. M. Sokolskii argued that jazz's African-American roots were a bourgeois falsity and that the real origins of modern jazz, as noted earlier, lay in American and European taverns.<sup>235</sup> Mikhail Druskin elaborated on this notion, arguing that the *real* African-American folk songs were black spirituals, which, of course, were also unsuitable for Soviet culture since they were rooted in Christianity.<sup>236</sup> Similarly, Iurii Motylev, complained about the disheartening number of "imported songs" that he heard various jazz bands play in Moscow's movie theaters. In his opinion, these songs were a discredit to black musical culture. Songs like "Negro Ragtime" and "Negro Wedding", performed by two different orchestras in two different movie theaters, were "cacophonies". "Who needs these mocking parodies of negro folk music?" he concluded.<sup>237</sup>

Soviet jazz advocates emphasized jazz's blackness for several reasons. In some ways, it was simply an extension of global jazz culture since jazz did emerge out of urban African American culture and many of the earliest performers were black. It also dovetailed with the rhetoric of proletarian internationalism, implying that performing jazz music was an expression of solidarity with oppressed blacks. However, in light of this rhetoric of solidarity, the fact that many foreign jazz songs were identified as "negro" without distinguishing country of origin, even if the songwriter was not black, suggests that jazz's blackness acted as a shield that jazz artists and supporters used to deflect

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<sup>235</sup> M. Sokol'skii, "Teatralizovannyi dzhaz: 'Neobychnoe puteshestvie' Berezovskogo", *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, August 2, 1933.

<sup>236</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, l. 20.

<sup>237</sup> Iu. Motylev, "Muzyka v foie kino", *Muzyka*, August 16, 1937.

criticism and to legitimize a form of mass culture that the Soviet Union shared with its western, bourgeois counterparts.

### **Jazz and Cosmopolitanism**

If the Bolsheviks were to integrate the best aspects of western civilization into a Moscow-based “world culture,” then the music of this world culture would inevitably come from the symphonic tradition of the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European composers. Though the works of composers such as Liszt, Mozart, and Johan Strauss had been banished from conservatories for being too “bourgeois” during the cultural revolution, they were restored to the apex of musical and cultural achievement in the subsequent decade. During the campaign for “culturedness” outlined in Chapter One, classical composers, especially pre-revolutionary Russian composers like Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, and Rachmaninov represented the pinnacle of musical culturedness.

For champions of this cosmopolitan world culture, jazz music was a threat. It was a threat not because of its sociological origins and impact, but because, in their eyes, the genre seemed destined to destroy the legacy of symphonic music. They asserted that jazz lacked the artistic sophistication that Soviet audiences needed and they often depicted it as noisy, raucous, and completely irreconcilable to any traditional understanding of music. In a speech before the Leningrad Composers’ Union in 1937, one comrade named Aronov told his colleagues about an amateur factory jazz band that rehearsed near where he worked. One day he decided to ask a worker at the factory how he liked the band and the worker responded that he thought they were “worse than a barnyard,” barking and oinking away. Nay, the worker concluded, even a barnyard was more poetic. Such jazz,

Aronov concluded, was not needed in the Soviet Union.<sup>238</sup> Another attendee at the meeting, comrade Chilaki, thought western jazz sounded utterly bizarre with its use of mutes on horns and unusual rhythmic sequences that seemed designed to “hypnotize” audiences rather than build them up.<sup>239</sup> Such opinions were not confined to musical elites. One listener, as noted above, complained that Aleksandr Tsfasman’s radio broadcasts were getting progressively worse, sounding more like “cacophonies a la [Duke] Ellington.”<sup>240</sup>

Some cultural elites argued not only that jazz lacked the sophistication of symphonic and classical music, but also that its popularity threatened the long-term viability of symphonic music in Soviet society. As noted in Chapter One, classical musicians earned a pittance compared to what accomplished jazz musicians could make and this meant that many symphonic musicians struggled to make a living, sometimes taking on two or three jobs at once. As one visiting foreign conductor observed, “how is it possible to build up an orchestra, or to improve the quality of playing, when the players are always tired to death?”<sup>241</sup>

Critics even accused the Committee of Arts Affairs of deliberately foisting jazz upon decent, classical-music loving audiences that did not want it. In an editorial piece published in *Izvestiia* in November 1936, composers A. Berlin and A. Broun expressed

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<sup>238</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, l. 38.

<sup>239</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 44-45.

<sup>240</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 54. (Letters from radio listeners sent to the All-Union Radio Committee, 1940)

<sup>241</sup> Heinz Unger as quoted in S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1991* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 159.

disbelief at the number of jazz ensembles that could be found on variety stages across the country and stated that it was the opposite case for symphonic ensembles. They decried the fact that collective farm workers were being forced to hear “Faust” (presumably a stab at musicians who had “sold their souls” to play jazz for financial gain rather than a reference to the opera of the same name) when they could be listening to Beethoven or Bizet for the first time.<sup>242</sup> K. Iudin wrote to *Izvestiia* that December to complain that jazz had usurped classical music not only in musical performances, but also in the manufacture of instruments. He wrote that instruments for symphonic ensembles were impossible to find, particularly woodwinds. Only saxophones, the instrument most frequently associated with jazz, seemed to be accessible. How was Soviet symphonic music supposed to develop, Iudin asked, without instruments? He suggested that jazz instruments, like jazz music, were being artificially privileged by the Soviet state.<sup>243</sup>

For those who believed in jazz’s potential as a Soviet art form, one of the main strategies to rebut these kinds of attacks against the genre was to call upon the legacy and practitioners of symphonic music to breathe new life into jazz. However popular jazz may have been, symphonic music was still widely regarded as the pinnacle of musical composition and performance and it was thought that incorporating symphonic and classical music into the jazz idiom and group repertoires would elevate the genre to a higher level. In response to the letter that Berlin and Broun wrote to *Izvestiia*, Boris Shumiatskii and Platon Kerzhentsev, the two top administrators of the Committee of Arts

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<sup>242</sup> Berlin and Broun, “Dzhaz ili simfoniia?”, *Izvestiia*, November 21, 1936.

<sup>243</sup> K. Iudin, “Dzhaz i instrumenty,” *Izvestiia*, December 10, 1936.

Affairs published separate responses in *Pravda*. Kerzhentsev readily admitted that symphonic music was “the highest form of music known to humanity,” especially Beethoven, but both figures argued that whatever criticisms Berlin and Broun had regarding jazz, these could be remedied by integrating symphonic music into jazz.<sup>244</sup> Such music could “rescue” jazz from the lows of its bourgeois origins. Shumiatskii pointed to mass song composers like Isaak Dunaevskii who wrote symphonic music specifically for jazz orchestras as well as artists like Utesov for performing them.<sup>245</sup> Some critics also praised certain foreign jazz artists, notably British bandleader Jack Hylton and the American Paul Whiteman, for doing essentially the same thing to great success in Europe and America.<sup>246</sup>

The argument that jazz’s potential could only be fully realized through the inclusion of symphonic music was further articulated in a meeting of the Leningrad Composers Union. Dunaevskii argued that, in order to distinguish Soviet jazz from the European style, composers and performers needed to incorporate elements of symphonic music. Dunaevskii himself had been doing this for years through the many mass songs that he had composed for Utesov and which had been picked up by other jazz artists. Unfortunately, he told the meeting, there were still too few composers working on new symphonic works for jazz. Until this deficit in repertoire could be remedied, jazz orchestras would do well to turn to classical works from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Significantly,

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<sup>244</sup> Platon Kerzhentsev, “O muzyke”, *Pravda*, December 4, 1936.

<sup>245</sup> Boris Shumiatskii, “Protiv khanzhei i sviatosh”, *Pravda*, November 24, 1936.

<sup>246</sup> For example, see Druskin, “U istokov dzhaza.”



Dunaevskii did not exclude foreign classical composers. Jazz artists could find inspiration, he argued, in the works of Haydn, Schubert, and Lully as well as Tchaikovsky, Rimski-Korsakov, and the other pre-revolutionary Russian composers. Incorporating songs by such composers, Dunaevskii stated, would pass on to jazz their “rhythmic brilliance, virtuosity of execution, and richness of timbre.”<sup>247</sup>

Some jazz artists had already been mixing classical with jazz since the early 1930s. In his hit stage production, *The Music Shop*, Utesov and his thea-jazz band performed excerpts from several classical pieces, including Rimski-Korsakov’s *Sadko*, Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, and Bizet’s *Carmen*. In some of these early cases, Utesov took a slightly irreverent approach to classical works, poking fun at the staid nature of operatic performance. In his heavily syncopated 1933 recording of selections from *Eugene Onegin*, Utesov speaks in Russian, but with a hammed-up American accent, highlighting the interplay of American and Russian culture in jazz.<sup>248</sup> His recording of *Rigoletto*’s “La donna e mobile” subtitled “A musical joke,” features multiple renditions of the song as if done by a traditional orchestra (the “international” variant), a “Spanish” variant in a flamenco style with castanets, and a “Caucasian” variant that rhythmically mimics a lezginka (a form of Caucasian dance).<sup>249</sup> The success of these songs inspired Utesov to explore classical music further. In 1935, he staged a jazz variation of *Carmen*, which

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<sup>247</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 34-35.

<sup>248</sup> “Opera ‘Eugene Onegin’, medley,” Russian-records.com, accessed February 13, 2016, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=14122](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=14122).

<sup>249</sup> “Serdtshe krasavitsy, muzykal’naia shutka,” 1000plastinok.net, accessed February 13, 2016, [http://1000plastinok.net/Leonid\\_Utesov/Muzykalnyi\\_magazin\\_Pamyati\\_Leonida\\_Utesova\\_-\\_1\\_1983/09-Serdtshe\\_krasavitsy\\_muzykalnaya\\_shutka.html](http://1000plastinok.net/Leonid_Utesov/Muzykalnyi_magazin_Pamyati_Leonida_Utesova_-_1_1983/09-Serdtshe_krasavitsy_muzykalnaya_shutka.html).

allowed him to “mock the clichéd situations and plots of the opera” and to add a sharp, “salt and pepper” flavor to classical works.<sup>250</sup> Utesov continued to work with classical music in subsequent years, drawing on both Russian and foreign composers for inspiration.<sup>251</sup>

Utesov was far from the only jazz artist to employ classical music for the cause of jazz. Boris Renskii, whose own Kharkov-based orchestra formed around the same time as Utesov’s, wrote in 1936 that he had always been committed to crafting and performing a truly Soviet repertoire. After abandoning early versions of “criminal” music, he too decided to rework classical music from composers like Rubinstein and Saint-Saens.<sup>252</sup> His 1930 interpretation of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* was praised in the Soviet press because as one reviewer said, while “European” jazz was the jazz of restaurants, cafes, and foxtrots, Renskii took jazz to another level with his theatrical interpretations of classical music.<sup>253</sup> Such successes, Renskii concluded, were proof that “performances of the most famous parts of musical heritage were full of possibilities for jazz.”<sup>254</sup>

The most highly regarded ensemble to embrace classical music, however, was the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR (*Gosudarstvennyi dzhaz-orkestr SSSR*, often shortened to *Gos-dzhaz*), led by Viktor Knushevitskii. Knushevitskii, who had penned several jazz

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<sup>250</sup> Leonid Utesov, *Spasibo serdtse!*, (Moskva: Vagrius, 2000), 233.

<sup>251</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo serdtse!*, 233.

<sup>252</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 79.

<sup>253</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 58.

<sup>254</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 79.

compositions and who had already led his own jazz band earlier in the decade, was recruited to form the new jazz orchestra in 1938. This new orchestra mainly played mass songs, especially those of the Jewish mass song composer Matvei Blanter, who also acted as the orchestra's musical director, but also performed classical pieces as well. Press reviews almost always made a point to compliment the orchestra's rendition of Tchaikovsky's "Sentimental Waltz" and Rachmaninov's "Prelude" and "Do Not Sing for Me".<sup>255</sup> One early review also praised the fact that Knushevitskii's orchestra did not treat these composers with irreverence the way Utesov did, nor simply use them as "raw materials" for foxtrots. Instead, the orchestra gave "new freshness and vigor" to the two great composers.<sup>256</sup> *Vecherniaia Moskva* proclaimed that the *Gos-dzhaz* had proven definitively that classical music could successfully be integrated into jazz.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, the far-eastern newspaper *Krasnoznamennyi amurets* declared that the *Gos-dzhaz*'s success should encourage jazz orchestras to not "stand aloof to classical composers."<sup>258</sup>

As with the internationalist emphasis on "negro" jazz, the move to incorporate symphonic music into jazz was not universally embraced by Soviet cultural elites. At a 1937 meeting of the Leningrad Composers' Union, Aronov stated that Utesov's rendition of the Dunaevskii and Mikhail Svetlov song "Kakhova", would have been right at home in a bourgeois café "or even in a Hitlerite café!" (Utesov, who was also in attendance,

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<sup>255</sup> RGALI f. 2922, op. 3, d. 996, ll. 1-22. (Documents about the first concerts of the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR, 1938-1939)

<sup>256</sup> RGALI f. 2922, op. 3, d. 996, l. 5.

<sup>257</sup> RGALI f. 2922, op. 3, d. 996, l. 3.

<sup>258</sup> RGALI f. 2922, op. 3, d. 996, l. 12.

smugly responded that nobody seemed to object when he performed the song for the Politburo the previous year).<sup>259</sup> Vladimir Muzalevskii, a musicologist at the Leningrad Conservatory, was similarly indignant when he saw a Swedish jazz orchestra perform works by Tchaikovsky in Leningrad. “Who gave jazz the right,” he queried, “to disfigure such genial and loved music, transforming the finale of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony into a continuous muddle?”<sup>260</sup> Conversely, one critic argued that incorporating the works of Bach or Chopin into jazz was an affront to *jazz* and that the only music that jazz orchestras should play is that rooted in “negro folklore.”<sup>261</sup>

While the utility of symphonic music in jazz was widely accepted, the relationship did not work the other way around. Incorporating jazz into symphonic music smacked of formalism and it is worth noting that the spat over jazz that played out in *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* in December 1936 took place less than a year after Dmitri Shostakovich had been taken to task for his “formalistic” opera *Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk*. In an anonymous critique of the opera published in *Pravda* that January, Shostakovich was accused of committing many sins in the opera, not least of which was that he had “borrowed jazz’s nervous, convulsive, epileptic music to give ‘passion’ to his characters.”<sup>262</sup> In a sense, the relationship between jazz and symphonic music was

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<sup>259</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 37, 39.

<sup>260</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 110.

<sup>261</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 179.

<sup>262</sup> “Sumbur vmeste muzyki”, *Pravda*, January 28, 1936.

colonial, with symphonic music on a civilizing mission to make jazz into the best version of itself, but always at risk of “going native.”

Jazz music touched a nerve in those who sought to create a cosmopolitan world culture in the Soviet Union. They did not object to it as western since many of them deeply admired western composers. Instead, it was jazz’s supposed lack of musical sophistication (if jazz could, indeed, be called music at all), combined with its ubiquity, that seemed to spell doom in the long run for Soviet practitioners and advocates of the classical tradition. To counter such criticisms, jazz’s supporters argued that, while western jazz groups might turn their backs on symphonic music, *Soviet* jazz artists could integrate it into their songs. This would not only elevate jazz to a higher art form itself, but it would make Soviet jazz infinitely superior to its western (bourgeois) equivalent. The close relationship between jazz and classical music in many Soviet jazz repertoires illustrates the “Great Appropriation” outlined by Clark.

### **Jazz and (Multi-)Nationalism**

The third method of adapting jazz to make it palatable for Soviet critics and audiences was to employ folk melodies and motifs belonging to one of the Soviet Union’s many ethnic populations. Rather than simply adopt American or European jazz styles and traditions, some artists adapted jazz to their own folk traditions, composing jazz songs centered around Russian, Jewish, or other folk themes. While many musicians and composers saw symphonic music as a potential savior of jazz, others argued that only by incorporating national music into orchestra repertoires, could there be any hope of developing an authentic Soviet jazz.

Cultivation of ethnic musical traditions was part and parcel of Soviet nationality policy. Throughout the 1930s, several of the non-Russian republics developed their own professional and amateur folk music ensembles. Republics and sectors of Soviet society such as the Red Army and the State Railway Agency also developed “song-and-dance ensembles” (*pesni i pliaski ansambli*) that combined traditional music with folk dance performances, though this music was heavily polished and sanitized compared to what might be found on ethnographic recordings. However, for the early part of the decade, there was little connection between the ethno-national trend in music and jazz.

Once again, Utesov was one of the first pioneers to incorporate Soviet ethnic music into jazz. For him jazz’s African-American form was not something that had to be copied. Rather, jazz was a mold that could be filled with any folk content. “If American jazz has negro folklore,” he once observed, “why can ours not perhaps have Georgian, Armenian, or Ukrainian [folklore]?”<sup>263</sup> Utesov outlined his vision more clearly in a conversation with Dunaevskii, his longtime friend and collaborator, in preparation for his 1930 revue, *Jazz at the Crossroads*. When Dunaevskii asked in what direction Utesov wanted his jazz to go, Utesov replied that he wanted to embrace national (*narodnye*) songs. “The path to jazz will sound close to our people. The path that [Soviet audiences] will hear was the same one heard by their fathers and grandfathers, but in a new guise.”<sup>264</sup> Utesov commissioned Dunaevskii to pen four jazz rhapsodies for him, three of which would embrace musical traditions familiar to both men. The first should be Russian, the

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<sup>263</sup> Leonid Utesov as quoted in Gleb Skorokhodov, *Neizvestnyi Utesov: K 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia*, (Moskva: Krestianka, 1995), 6.

<sup>264</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo serdtse!*, 218.

second Ukrainian since they were both born there (Utesov in Odessa, Dunaevskii in Kharkov), and the third should be Jewish since, as Utesov said, “we are no strangers to that [music].”<sup>265</sup> Dunaevskii quickly arranged a series of rhapsodies based around Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish folk themes. His “Jewish Rhapsody”, which Utesov recorded in Yiddish (the only known instance of him performing in the language) and Russian, features many of the characteristics of klezmer, including wailing, expressive solos on clarinet, saxophone, and violin. The centerpiece of the song is an adaptation of the humorous Yiddish song “How Does the Tsar Drink Tea?” (*Vi Azoy Trinkt Der Keyser Tey?*). The lyrics were re-written by Nikolai Erdman to make them more Soviet. First, Erdman replaced references to the tsar with the more specific “tsar Nicholas II”. Then, at the end of the final verse, he added another line:

Tell me, grandfather, *oi* please tell me, how did Tsar Nicholas sleep?

I’ll tell you, he slept like this: They filled a huge, huge room with swan feathers, upon which Tsar Nicholas lay down and slept. Around him stood a company of Cossacks who fired a cannon and shouted, ‘SHUSH, everyone be quiet! The tsar is sleeping!’ And that is how tsar Nicholas slept through his entire reign...

Now children, I’ll tell you what happened next. What happened next, children, was that real life started. So, let’s dance.”<sup>266</sup>

What follows is three minutes of largely instrumental music at a relatively fast tempo with solos on saxophone and Utesov occasionally humming a *nigun* (a Yiddish melody).

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<sup>265</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo serdtse!*, 218. Both Utesov and Dunaevskii were Jewish.

<sup>266</sup> *Skazhi mne, dedushka, oi skazhi zhe mne, kak tsar’ Nikolai spal?/ A spal on, byvalno, tak: brali bol’shuiu-bol’shuiu komnatu i zasypali ee lebiazh’im pukhom. Vverkhu lozhilsia tsar’ Nikolai, a krugam stoiali kazaki, streliali iz pushek i krichali: “Shcha! Chtob bylo tikho! Tsar’ Nikolai spit!” I tak on prospal vse svoe tsarstvo... / Teper’ detki, ia vam skazhu, chto bylo dal’she. A dal’she, deti, nachalas’ nastoiashchaia zhizn’. Tak davaite zhe potantsuem.*

Erdman and, through his recording, Utesov, imply that life has improved for Jews since the tsars were replaced by the Bolsheviks. They further imply that jazz is itself a joyous expression of this liberation. In addition to these folk rhapsodies, Utesov also performed the highly local “criminal” songs of his native city of Odessa, as mentioned in Chapter Two, which heavily played upon not only the city’s criminal reputation, but also its Jewishness.

Although Utesov was melding jazz and folk in his repertoire from the early 1930s, folk music was not widely embraced as a source for Soviet jazz until later in the decade. In a 1934 article in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, the Leningrad-based composer Vladimir Shcherbachev lamented that the light genres, of which jazz was a significant part, were ruining traditional music through their “pseudofolkloric” arrangements.<sup>267</sup> It was not until 1936 that the subject was discussed more broadly in the context of the *Pravda-Izvestiia* fight over jazz’s role in Soviet society. As with classical music, jazz’s critics argued that it was drowning out opportunities for folk music to flourish. When Berlin and Broun complained that it was impossible to find phonograph records of symphonic music, they added that those searching for folk records fared little better.<sup>268</sup> K. Iudin made similar statements in his assessment of Soviet instrument manufacturing. Semen Korev added that radio listeners wanted both symphonic *and* folk music instead of jazz on the airwaves.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> V. Shcherbachev, “V chem zlo?”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 23 noiabria 1934 g.

<sup>268</sup> Berlin and Broun, “Eshche o dzhaze.”

<sup>269</sup> Iudin, “Dzhaz i instrumenty.”



Members of the Leningrad Composers' Union discussed the issue in greater detail the next year. Georgii Landsberg, a jazz composer and bandleader since the late 1920s, suggested that folk influences were particularly useful in instrumental jazz. The path forward in this body of jazz music, Landsberg argued, was through folk music. "If we take Russian or Ukrainian folk themes and rework them with jazz instruments, not falling into 'foxtrotism', but using the principle of variation... it is possible to accomplish anything."<sup>270</sup> Dunaevskii concurred with Landsberg and stated that one of the keys to developing an authentically Soviet jazz repertoire was to employ the music and possibly also the instruments of the Soviet nationalities.<sup>271</sup>

With a few rare exceptions, jazz songs that utilized folk melodies or themes drew on the nationalities in the Soviet Union's western regions.<sup>272</sup> Russian songs were the most popular, but several groups also performed Ukrainian or Belorussian songs alongside Georgian, Armenian, or, less frequently, gypsy music. Knushevitskii is credited with creating instrumental rhapsodies and fantasies based upon Ukrainian, Russian, Jewish, and Caucasian melodies and these songs could be found in the repertoires of several jazz

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<sup>270</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, l. 28.

<sup>271</sup> RGALI f. 2062, op. 1, d. 331, ll. 34-35.

<sup>272</sup> Unfortunately, the only evidence of locally-based jazz in the Central Asian republics are two recordings by P. Chapleevskii's Uzbek Jazz Orchestra and letters from déclassé noble Vladimir Trubetskoi telling his nephew about the jazz band he played in while exiled in Andijan, Uzbekistan. For Chapleevskii, see "Oskari (fokstrot)," Russian-records.com, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=13318](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=13318). For Trubetskoi, see Family Archive of Mikhail Sergeevich Trubetskoi (Vladimir Sergeevich Trubetskoi to Vladimir Mikhailovich Trubetskoi, 1934-1937).

bands ranging from Knushevitskii's own State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR to the Moscow-based Accordion Jazz Orchestra.<sup>273</sup>

Jewish music was also prevalent in Soviet jazz. In addition to the "Jewish Rhapsody", Utesov recorded "Uncle Elia" in 1939. With lyrics by Soviet-Yiddish poet Elizaveta Polonskii, the song is about a vivacious old uncle who dances and drinks to the sounds of fiddles, trumpets, drums, and, in the final verse, a gramophone. The song mixes tempos throughout and at the end, the orchestra mimics the sound of a gramophone winding down and then slowly increasing in speed as it is rewound. The result is, in effect, a Hungarian *czardas*, with the orchestra starting at a slow tempo and gradually increasing until the song concludes at a frantic pace. Other Jewish jazz songs included Knushevitskii's own "Jewish Rhapsody," which several jazz groups included in their repertoires, and Iakov Skomorovskii's "Jewish Melody," a duet between trumpet and piano that mimicked a *nigun*.<sup>274</sup> The Polish-Jewish group of Genrikh Gol'd and Iurii Petersburgskii borrowed the tactic of using generic, ethnic titles to smuggle American songs past censors and submitted the 1932 Yiddish-American hit "Bei Mir Bist Du Shein" to censors under the title "Jewish Fantasy."<sup>275</sup>

The prevalence of so many different strains of Soviet folk music, alongside political overtures to newly incorporated populations, is evidence that some Soviet jazz

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<sup>273</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 656, op. 3, dd. 4729, 4786, and 4800. (Repertoires of the Jazz-Accordion Orchestra, M.I. Grossman's jazz orchestra, and S.Kh. Samoilov's jazz orchestra)

<sup>274</sup> "Evreiskaia rapsodiia, medley," Russian-records.com, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=16353](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=16353). This is not to be confused with Dunaevskii's composition. "Evreiskaia melodiia, chamber piece," Russian-records.com, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=15018](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=15018).

<sup>275</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4781, l. 25. (Repertoire of G. Gol'd and Iu. Petersburgskii's Jazz Orchestra, 1940-1941).

songwriters, musicians, and censors believed that Soviet jazz did not have to merely copy the works of European and American jazz artists. They could adapt jazz to the Soviet context and utilize the country's own rich folk repertoire. In so doing, these figures created a jazz that was "authentically" Soviet.

## **Conclusion**

Long before *Circus*'s denouement, detailed in the beginning of this chapter, the circus manager, Ludvig, and his performance director, Ivan, watch Marion Dixon sing a jazz song (replete with phrases like "Diga diga do, how are you?") while dancing atop the cannon that fires her up to her trapeze in the rafters of the circus arena.<sup>276</sup> After her act, the circus manager turns to Ivan and asks his thoughts about her performance.

"You see?" Ludvig says, "We need a number of our own, with our own materials."

"But," Ivan replies, "We need a number better than theirs."

"We've such aviation, can't we make a dummy of a flying machine?" asks Ludvig.

Although the two men were referring to Dixon's human bullet routine, their comments could easily be applied to jazz, the musical backdrop for Dixon's act. Jazz clearly appealed to Soviet audiences, but many cultural elites thought that it was necessary to make Soviet jazz better than its western equivalent, preferably "with [their] own materials."

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<sup>276</sup> "Diga-diga-do" was the title of a 1928 jazz song and show tune written by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields. The song was performed by many artists, including some from the USSR.

This question of whether or how to make Soviet jazz better was central to the jazz public sphere, and the responses to this question signaled diverse attitudes towards the nature of Soviet culture and how it related to the West. Jazz advocates and performers embraced internationalism and expressed their affinity towards the non-Soviet proletariat not just through their embrace of foreign jazz songs, but by connecting these songs, and their own works, to African American and African culture. At the same time, jazz advocates also saw the genre as a potential tool in the struggle to create a Soviet-based world culture. The integration of European and Russian classical music into jazz reveals that jazz musicians and arrangers believed that Soviet jazz could transcend the “restaurant/bar” jazz of the West to not only edify Soviet audiences, but act as a beacon of the country’s cultural and ideological superiority over the rest of the world. Finally, by adapting the Russian, Jewish, or other folk motifs native to the Soviet Union into jazz instrumentation, artists expressed an interest in domestic national cultivation and development that was divorced from relations with the outside world, a kind of “jazz in one country.”

What is most significant about all this is not that jazz enthusiasts utilized these three approaches to defend jazz and integrate it into Soviet life, but that they actively intertwined all three approaches. Just as internationalist anti-racism, symphonic music, and cultural multi-nationalism intertwined in the climactic scene of *Circus*, most Soviet jazz repertoires in the 1930s featured foreign/“negro” jazz songs alongside jazzified classical works and folk songs. Aleksandr Tsfasman’s repertoire included an excerpt from *Carmen* alongside a “Georgian Rhapsody” and a lightning-fast rendition of “The Man From the South (With a Big Cigar In His Mouth).” I.I. Krutianskii’s repertoire for

the 1940 season featured Knushevitskii's "Jewish Rhapsody," a waltz by Johann Strauss, and "Negro Stomp." Even Knushevitskii's *Gos-dzhaz*, which garnered so much praise for its interpretations of the classical oeuvre, performed several ethnic rhapsodies and recorded versions of Duke Ellington's "Caravan" and Teddy Powell's "The Snake Charmer."

The fact that so many groups performed songs from each of the three categories described above suggests that many Soviet citizens could reconcile internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and multi-nationalism within the bounds of Soviet culture. While historians may disagree on which approach took precedence at any given time, audiences, songwriters, and musicians believed that all three approaches worked simultaneously and without contradiction. What is more, the fact that songs from each of these perspectives were frequently performed and recorded indicates that even Soviet censors, those who were responsible for ensuring that improper music never reached the Soviet public, believed that internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and nationalism could work hand-in-hand. This means that even the Soviet state was never fully committed to one particular way of relating to the outside world during the 1930s. The discussions surrounding the merits of these approaches and jazz musicians' willingness to engage with them is evidence that the Soviet jazz community had its own ideas about Soviet society's relationship with the West.

While the Soviet jazz scene managed a delicate balance between each of these approaches during the 1930s, this balance was thrown into chaos in June 1941, when Axis forces attacked and crossed the Soviet frontier. Soviet jazz was now mobilized, along with the rest of the country, for total war, and this shifted the debate of the Soviet

jazz public sphere from questions about relations with the west and diverse Soviet ethnicities to a more fundamental question about the nature of Soviet patriotism and what, exactly, Soviet citizens were defending in the war effort.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Propaganda as Dialogue: “Patriotic” Jazz in a Patriotic War

#### Introduction

The 1942 film *Concert for the Front* (*Kontsert frontu*) opens in a Red Army bunker on the Soviet-German frontier. Under heavy shelling from German positions, a small cluster of soldiers celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the October Revolution. The soldiers recall how, before the war, they used to celebrate the holiday with parades and concerts. Suddenly, one of the soldiers strikes upon a brilliant idea: a jubilee concert featuring their favorite performers that could be filmed and sent to units across the front so that soldiers and sailors could celebrate the revolution’s anniversary just as they would have in peacetime. Excitedly, the soldiers begin to put together a list of performers they want to see in this concert-film and almost immediately they shout in unison, “Utesov! Utesov!” – referring to jazz singer and bandleader Leonid Utesov. They add the names of other performers like folk singer Lidia Ruslanova, tenor Ivan Kozlovskii, and the Red Army Ensemble and send the list off to Moscow. The rest of the film is the resulting concert and a veritable who’s who of Soviet entertainment from the Stalin period, featuring poetry recitals, a ballet routine, and a concluding performance by Utesov and his jazz orchestra.

This opening vignette, along with the rest of *Concert for the Front*, illustrates the dialogical nature of propaganda. Rhetorical philosopher Douglas Walton argues that propaganda constitutes a form of dialogue because it requires a communicative relationship between speaker and audience. For appeals to the masses to be effective, the speaker must anticipate what the audience will respond to. Respondents engage in this

dialogue by responding positively or negatively to the message, which the speaker may then use to craft a more persuasive argument.<sup>277</sup> In the case of *Concert for the Front*, the film was created and produced in Moscow in order to mobilize Red Army soldiers and civilians to keep up the fight against Germany. Yet from its outset, the film implies that it was simple soldiers on the country's geographical and metaphorical periphery, not political and cultural elites in the Soviet metropole, who first called for the film's creation (it is unknown whether this was, in fact, the inspiration for the film). Moreover, the performers in the film were not strangers foisted upon audiences against their will. Luminaries like Utesov, the clown Karandash, and jazz singer Klavdiia Shul'zhenko were already established and popular entertainers well before their appearance in *Concert for the Front*. In the film, these popular figures not only entertained Soviet audiences, but also encouraged them to continue the war effort even though, at the time of the film's release, the cities of Leningrad and Stalingrad were at risk of capture. The Soviet leadership sought to mobilize its population to keep fighting and, to do so, it anticipated the emotions and desires of its target audience by recruiting well-loved entertainers to perform for them. In this sense, the film and audience reaction to it constitute a form of dialogue between the Stalinist regime, its entertainment industry, and the mass population and, therefore, a limited public sphere.

In this chapter, I argue that the Soviet jazz public sphere facilitated a similar dialogue in its role as propaganda during the Great Patriotic War (the term used to denote the Soviet war against the Axis forces from 1941-1945). This dialogue focused on

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<sup>277</sup> Douglas Walton, "What Is Propaganda, and What Exactly Is Wrong with It", *Public Affairs Quarterly* 11(4), October 1997, 396-397.



competing definitions of “patriotism” and what Soviet citizens regarded as “homeland.” The participants included songwriters and performers on the one side, and audiences on the other side, with the party-state mediating between the two. Like their counterparts in the United States, Great Britain, and elsewhere, Soviet jazz artists mobilized for the war effort and encouraged audiences, whether military or civilian, to keep up their spirits in times of hardship, and to carry on fighting until total victory was achieved. Major artists like Utesov, Shul’zhenko, Aleksandr Tsfasman, and Eddie Rosner toured frontline positions, hospitals, and civilian areas and they recorded new songs and radio performances for the war effort. They were joined by countless other professional and amateur jazz groups that formed in military regiments, flotillas and elsewhere with the same goals in mind.<sup>278</sup>

There is considerable debate among historians about the messages that Soviet propagandists wanted to project during the Great Patriotic War. Some historians emphasize the central role that Russian nationalism played in Soviet propaganda and popular culture during the war. David Brandenberger argues that, while the emphasis on Russian nationalism dated back to pre-war attempts to popularize Marxist-Leninist ideology (including proletarian internationalism) through “a more accessible vocabulary of Russian national heroes, myths, and iconography,” the panic created by the German invasion in 1941 drove many propagandists to abandon any pretext towards internationalism or even multi-nationalism and instead relied upon appeals to Russian

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<sup>278</sup> Aleksei Batashev, *Sovetskii dzhaz: Istoricheskii ocherk* (Moskva: Muzyka, 1972), 89-91.

heroes and history.<sup>279</sup> To be sure, Brandenberger argues, cultural products that catered to non-Russian peoples were produced during the war, but their rate of production was far outpaced by their Russian equivalents:

...for every new non-Russian heroic biography that appeared during these years, a dozen similar works concerning [medieval Russian prince and Orthodox saint Aleksandr] Nevskii, [tsarist general Aleksandr] Suvorov, and [tsarist Field Marshal Mikhail] Kutuzov rolled off the presses. Each new Ukrainian historical novel had to compete for recognition not only with [Aleksandr] Tolstoi, but with [Lev] Tolstoi.... Kazakh and Acmeist poetry vied for public acclaim with [Russian-Soviet poet Konstantin] Simonov and [19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian poet Mikhail] Lermontov.... The same is true for theater, opera, film, and the visual arts.<sup>280</sup>

Other scholars are wary of overstating the centrality of Russian nationalist rhetoric in wartime propaganda. Karel C. Berkhoff argues that, although the Soviet media depicted Russia as the “elder brother” within the brotherhood of Soviet nations after 1941, and repeatedly claimed that ethnic Russians were particularly worthy and suited to defending Soviet territory, the regime acted to temper the spread of Russocentric propaganda. He notes that Josef Stalin himself rarely made reference to Russia, preferring the far more elastic concept of the “[Soviet] motherland” (*rodina*). At the end of the war, he attributed victory not to Russian greatness, but to mass loyalty to the Soviet Motherland and fraternal bonds between Soviet nationalities. As Berkhoff observes,

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<sup>279</sup> David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 115-132.

<sup>280</sup> Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 144-145.

“Russocentrism remained a tendency and did not become a policy” during the Great Patriotic War.<sup>281</sup>

Still other historians argue that Russian nationalism, indeed any kind of nationalism, was only part of a broader range of narratives that proliferated in the slightly more open atmosphere of Soviet wartime media. Jeffrey Brooks, for example, argues that the Soviet wartime press “was more than a simple co-mingling of Soviet Communism and Russian nationalism.”<sup>282</sup> Different figures, be they journalists, poets, or others, expressed their own narratives about the war, many of which resonated with readers. The literary journalist Ilia Eherenburg, for example, often referred simply to “civilians and soldiers” rather than to specific nationalities in his articles. He and others also utilized the collective pronoun *we* to encompass the organic collective of a “nation in arms” that surpassed the bounds of either the Soviet state or any given nationality.<sup>283</sup> Similarly, Lisa Kirschenbaum argues that Soviet wartime propaganda conflated public and private life by employing the imagery of the home, especially mothers and wives, as a metaphor for the Soviet motherland. All good “sons” at the front were motivated to fight because in order to protect one’s hearth and home, one also had to protect the Soviet “home.” These appeals were an attempt to “represent the war in an emotionally authentic, if not factually

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<sup>281</sup> Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda During World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 202-207.

<sup>282</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 160.

<sup>283</sup> Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*, 188, 181.

accurate, way and to emphasize the degree to which the war could and should be understood by means of individuals' responses to it."<sup>284</sup>

In this chapter, I build on these bodies of research and show that wartime jazz repertoires, incorporated a variety of narratives about what constituted the Soviet homeland and what it meant to be "patriotic."<sup>285</sup> Jazz artists recognized that different listeners had different motivations to fight (or *not* fight) for the Soviet cause and would not all respond to the same songs in the same ways. These artists, therefore, offered multiple interpretations of patriotism as represented in various song tropes. Some songs appealed to traditional, abstract notions of patriotism tied to Soviet territory and military tradition and their historical antecedents in the Russian Empire. Other songs conflated the homeland with geographically specific locations within Soviet territory, especially the fallen city of Odessa. Still others conceptualized the homeland as the intense personal bonds that soldiers developed with loved ones at home and with each other on the front. These tropes reflect what Alon Confino refers to as *heimat*, the "[mediation] between local place and nation."<sup>286</sup> The Soviet "homeland" was not simply a large, abstract entity embodied in the Soviet state, it was the tangible aspects of everyday life: one's hometown, one's home and loved ones, and one's comrades-in-arms. Audience

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<sup>284</sup> Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "'Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families': Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda," *Slavic Review* 59 (4), Winter 2000, 825-847.

<sup>285</sup> I use the gender neutral term "homeland" as opposed to "fatherland" or "motherland" as used by the regime.

<sup>286</sup> Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 98.

willingness to embrace or not embrace these narratives reflected their own understanding of what was “patriotic” about the Great Patriotic War.

As in peacetime, the extensive Soviet bureaucratic apparatus mediated the relationship between jazz artists and audiences during the war. Before songs could reach the public, artists and songwriters had to submit their repertoires to a variety of party and state institutions, including the Union of Composers, the Committee of Arts Affairs, the Main Political Administrations of the Army or Navy, and, as before the war, the censorship bodies of Glavrepertkom and the Main Directorate of Repertoire Control (*Glavnoe upravlenie repertuarnogo kontroliia* or GURK). Any one of these organizations could reject individual songs, whole repertoires, or even members of ensembles if they did not display sufficient musicianship.<sup>287</sup> On the road, the ideological purity of touring jazz groups was further ensured through the constant presence of *politruki* (political commissars). *Politruki* travelled with the groups, liaised with individual units, and made sure there were no inappropriate performances. Divisional and local party cell *politruki* also helped to organize visits from touring artists to both military and civilian locations.<sup>288</sup> The output of jazz ensembles during the war had to, first and foremost, conform to standards outlined by the state.

While bureaucrats mediated the relationship between wartime jazz and Soviet audiences, it would be erroneous to conclude that jazz groups were simply conduits for

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<sup>287</sup> Suzanne Ament, “Sing to Victory: The Role of Popular Song in the Soviet Union During World War II” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1996).

<sup>288</sup> A.N. Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman: Korifei sovetskogo dzhaza*, (Moskva: Muzyka, 2006), 56; Olga Anatol’evna Korzhova, *Dzhaz v Rostove-na-donu “ot” i “po”*, (Rostov-na-don: Izd. “Pegas”, 2001), 21. See also the many letters Utesov received from *politruki* during the war. RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, dd. 856-858.

official ideology. Although the censorship apparatus looked formidable on paper, it is unclear how efficiently it functioned in practice and, as will be seen below, there is evidence that jazz artists were occasionally able to sidestep these bureaucratic obstacles.<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, wartime jazz musicians, whether speaking in the Soviet or post-Soviet era, all recalled their desire to understand the needs and desires of Soviet soldiers and civilians and perform music that would speak to these needs and desires in a way that encouraged audiences to keep fighting. Emil Gegner, one of Aleksandr Tsfasman's bandmates during the war, recalled the overwhelmingly positive reactions they received from soldiers during their performances, which included some that will be discussed below. This only reinforced the ensemble's belief that they "were doing a necessary and proper thing."<sup>290</sup> This communicative relationship between jazz artists and their audiences indicates that the jazz public sphere persisted throughout the war and created a space for diverse groups to consider what was so "patriotic" about the Great Patriotic War.

To illustrate the multiple narratives of patriotism that Soviet jazz artists projected during the war, I will first briefly discuss the "patriotic" music of the pre-war years. I will then lay out the four broad conceptualizations of the "homeland" that jazz artists presented at one time or another during the war: Russia as "homeland"; "homeland" as one's own community, with the fallen city of Odessa acting as a symbol upon which listeners could imprint their own community; "homeland" as the personal relationship

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<sup>289</sup> Ament, "Sing to Victory."

<sup>290</sup> Emil' Geigner as quoted in A.N. Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman: Korifei sovetskogo dzhaza* (Moskva: Muzyka, 2006), 54-55.

between soldiers and their loved ones; and “homeland” as the bonds between soldiers fighting on the front. For each section I analyze the lyrics of a selection of songs and, where possible, audience reactions to them. The pattern that emerges is that all the narrative tropes offered resonated with some audience members, but it was the local and personal interpretations that resonated most as opposed to the broader appeals to Russian nationalism.

### **“Patriotic” Music in the Pre-War Years**

Patriotic songs were nothing new to jazz when the Germans invaded in 1941. The subgenre of “patriotic songs” (*patrioticheskie pesni*) was already well-embedded in several jazz repertoires by the mid-1930s. Most of these patriotic songs were odes to various expressions of Soviet power and, although not written specifically for jazz orchestras, several jazz artists included these songs in their repertoires. Many, though not all, of these songs shared several characteristics: they adulated Soviet leaders or institutions of power; they employed the internationalist rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism; to the extent that they drew on military history, it was confined to post-revolutionary military history, especially the Russian Civil War (1918-1921); they were also mostly abstract and impersonal and their references to “the people” or “the nation(s).”

Many pre-war patriotic songs singled out prominent party leaders for adulation. The most obvious subject of such songs was Stalin himself. Stalin was presented as the glorious figurehead around whom all Soviet life revolved and the embodiment of the Soviet people. In its “Song About Stalin” (written by mass song composer Matvei Blanter), the Voroshilov Railway Jazz Orchestra sang,

From border to border, on mountains high  
Where the eagle freely flies  
The people (*narod*) compose a beautiful song  
About Stalin, so wise, dear, and beloved

The song flies more quickly than a bird  
And peace outlives wicked oppressors  
It will not support positions and borders  
It will not support any such borders

She fears neither whips nor bullets  
The song sounds in the fires of the barricades  
They sing this song in the rickshaws and coolies  
The Chinese soldier sings this song

...

And we sing this song with pride  
And with glory the great Stalinist years  
About life we sing, beautiful and happy  
About the joy of our happy victories

From border to border, on mountains high  
Where airplanes lead their own conversation  
The nations (*narody*) sing a beautiful song  
About Stalin, so wise, dear, and beloved.<sup>291</sup>

In this song, patriotism is rooted in the close relationship that the Soviet population (indeed, even foreign populations) have with Stalin. Crucially, it is not Stalin, but *love* for Stalin that creates the “song” that liberates the world. Voronin's group also performed

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<sup>291</sup> *Ot kraia do kraia, po gornym vershinam/ Gde vol'nyi orel sovershaet polet/ O Staline mudroom, rodnom, i liubimom/ Prekrasnuiu pesniu slagaet narod/ Letit eta pesnia bystree, chem ptitsa/ I mir ugnetaetelei zlobno prozhit:/ Ee ne uderzhat posty i granitsy/ Ee ne uderzhat nich'i rubezhi/ Ee ne strashat ni nagaiki, ni puli/ Zyuchit eta pesnia v ogne barrikad/ Poiut etu pesniu i riksha, i kuli/ Poet etu pesniu kitaiskii soldat/ .../ A my etu pesniu poem gordelivo/ I slavim velichie stalinskikh let/ O zhizni poem my, prekrasnoi, schastlivoi/ O radosti nashikh schastlivykh pobed/ Ot kraia do kraia, po gornym vershinam/ Gde svoi razgovor samolety vedut/ O Staline mudroom, rodnom, I liubimom/ Prekrasnuiu pesniu narody poiut.*



odes to other members of the Soviet leadership, particularly to Kliment Voroshilov, in whose honor the group was named.<sup>292</sup>

Other patriotic jazz songs drew on the historical relevance of the Russian Civil War in calling on the proletariat to defend itself against counter-revolutionary forces. Several jazz groups performed “From Border to Border” (*Ot kraia do kraia*), a song from Ivan Dzerzhinskii’s 1935 opera about the Civil War, *Quiet Flows the Don* (*Tikhii Don*).<sup>293</sup> The song is a call to arms to defend Soviet territory and it does so by calling on the proletariat to defend its borders against an implied counter-revolutionary force:

From border to border,  
From sea to sea,  
Take up the rifle  
Laboring people  
Fighting people  
Prepare for the mountain  
Prepare for the torments  
Prepare for the deathly struggle!

For land, for freedom  
For a better life  
We go once more to the front  
But knowing why  
We know why  
For land, for freedom  
For a better life  
We are prepared for the deathly struggle!<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4778, l. 25. (Repertoire of the Voronin Jazz Orchestra, 1939-1940)

<sup>293</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4786, l. 2 (Repertoire of M.M. Grossman Jazz Orchestra, 1938); d. 4806, l. 6 (Repertoire of Celestine Cole, 1937), for example.

<sup>294</sup> *Ot kraia do kraia/ Ot moria do moria/ Beret vintovku/ Narod trudovoi/ Narod boevoi/ Gotovy na gore/ Gotovy na muki/ Gotovy na smertnyi boi/ Za zemliu, za voliu/ Za luchshuiu doliu/ Idem opiat' na front/ No znaia, za chto/ My znaem, za chto/ Za zemliu, za voliu/ Za luchshuiu doliu/ Gotovy na smertnyi boi!*

The second stanza articulates that, whereas under the tsars poor workers and peasants went to fight and die for causes they could not relate to, this was not the case in the Soviet Union. In the cradle of the Marxist revolution, it is the “laboring people”—the proletariat—who must fight for the cause of justice and for the survival of the workers’ revolution.

Another popular theme in pre-war patriotic songs was the depiction of the Soviet military as a formidable, if not invincible, force on the battlefield. The Merry Chefs jazz ensemble performed a “humorous Red Army song” entitled “Welcome” (*Milosti prosim*). The lyrics, written by poet and lyricist Vasili Lebedev-Kumach, use the language of cooking and entertaining to boast of what will happen when an enemy “guest” comes to “visit” the Red Army:

If the enemy wants to come visit the Red Army  
We can find them a treat day and night

Our cooks have spirit  
And uncountable provisions  
There are some nice mortars  
And there are also anti-aircraft guns

We are able to heap different foods  
To prepare for a meal  
We have steel and gunpowder  
To make a vinagret for our guests.

Our tanks are like cuisine  
Quickly fry up a machine gun  
An artillery gun strikes, an artillery gun fires  
A compote is prepared for our guests.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4776, l. 15. (Repertoire of the “Merry Chefs” jazz ensemble, 1939). *Esli v gosti vrag zakhochet/ K Krasnoi armii priiti/ My sumeem dnem i noch'iu/ Ugoshchenie naiti/ Povara u nas likhie/ I provizii ne schest'/ Est' mortiry neplokhie/ I zenitki tozhe est'/ Raznykh bliud sumeem vorokh/ Prigotovit' na obed/ Est' u nas I stal' i porokh/ Sdelat' gostiu vinegret./ Nashi tanki – vrode kukhni/ Krepko zharit pulemet/ Pushka trakhnet, pushka bukhnet/ Dlia gostei gotov kompot.*

Other groups, like the State Railway Jazz Orchestra, used songs like “Blood Brothers” (*Rodnye brat'ia*) to not only praise the Red Army and its fighting spirit, but also to illustrate the close relationship between the military and the railroad system.<sup>296</sup>

By the late 1930s, the prospect of war became more concrete within the context of Soviet patriotic songs. This was particularly true after the 1938 Battle of Lake Khasan in which the Red Army successfully repelled a Japanese incursion from Manchukuo into Soviet territory. Although the battle itself resulted in a stalemate, Soviet songwriters interpreted it as a resounding Soviet victory. Songs like “Far Eastern [Song]” (*Dal'nevostochnaia*), also referred to as “Banzai Bunnies” (*Zaitsakh-banzaitsakh*) depicted the Battle of Lake Khasan as part of a long running, futile attempt by Japan to occupy Siberia that dated back to the Civil War.<sup>297</sup>

Japanese generals  
Dreamed of the Urals  
They dreamed of wandering around the Urals  
They came on the twentieth (*v dvadtsatom*)  
To the Urals like thieves  
Yes, we met at Baikal on the way

At Baikal  
You were broken  
Beaten, beaten  
And you said,  
Ok, bye!

Seventeen years you have been trying  
Seventeen years you have been attempting  
To imperceptibly climb into our pocket  
Once on the border

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<sup>296</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4790, l. 25. (Repertoire of the Railroad Jazz Orchestra, 1939-1941).

<sup>297</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4778, l. 23 and d. 4790, l. 17.

You came to drink a little water  
You came to drink a little water from Lake Khasan

At Khasan  
You were broken  
Beaten, beaten  
And you said,  
Ok, bye!<sup>298</sup>

The song goes on to boast that when the Japanese try to invade again, the Red Army will “un-banzai” them (*razbanzaem*).

Pre-war patriotic jazz songs such as those discussed here exuded confidence in both the supremacy of the “wise, dear, and beloved” Soviet leadership and in the proficiency of the Soviet military. Songwriters also drew on the myths of the Russian Civil War and, to a lesser degree, border skirmishes with Japan as a means of mobilizing audiences to steadfastly defend Soviet territory, the home of proletarianism. By 1945, many of these themes would morph or disappear entirely from patriotic jazz music.

### **The Nation as Homeland: Russocentrism in Soviet Jazz**

The German invasion sparked a transition in Soviet jazz repertoires. Klavdiia Shul’zhenko recalled that, in the wake of war, it felt wrong to perform many of her pre-war songs since they now felt so flippant and irrelevant.<sup>299</sup> In the first months after the outbreak of hostilities, Soviet jazz repertoires continued to employ some of the same

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<sup>298</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4790, l. 17. *Iapontsy – generaly/ Mechtali do Urala/ Mechtali do Urala dobresti/ Poshli oni v dvadtsatom/ K Uralu vorovato/ Da vstretilis’ s Baikalom na puti./ Na Baikale/ Nalomali/ Vam boka/ Byli byli/ Govorili/ Ny, poka/ Semnadtsat’ let chesalis’/ Semnadtsat’ let pytalis’/ Zabrata’ sia nezametno k nam v karman/ Odnazhdy na granitsu/ Prishli popit’ voditsu/ Prishli popit’ voditsu iz ozera Khasan.*

<sup>299</sup> Klavdiia Shul’zhenko, “*Kogda vy sprositate menia...*” (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1981), 82.

patriotic themes of the pre-war era, but also took on new themes as well. One theme which some of these songs shared with other forms of Soviet propaganda was an appeal to Russian nationalism and its pre-revolutionary history. One song that indicates this transition is “Fighting Militia” (*Boevaia opolchenskaia*), which multiple groups, including Aleksandr Tsfasman’s, performed on Soviet radio in October 1941.<sup>300</sup> The following lyrics showcase this transition:

The formidable militia strides  
The whole nation took up arms  
For you, dear fatherland  
The militia marched to the campaign

The Germans were beaten by our great-grandfathers at Pskov  
From Berlin we took the keys  
Once more we shall slice up the fascist dogs  
The butchers shall not escape from death

The dark days of war have come  
We will fight until victory  
We are ready, Comrade Stalin,  
To defend our precious borders.<sup>301</sup>

The song still employs pre-war tropes such as appeals to Stalin, pride in the Soviet military and confidence in its victory. What differentiates it from pre-war patriotic songs is its allusion to pre-revolutionary military history and the Russian victory over the

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<sup>300</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 14, d. 1, ll. 145, 433. (Musical broadcasts on Soviet radio for October 1941)

<sup>301</sup> *Opolchen'e groznoe shagaet / Za oruzh'e vziatsia ves' narod. / Za tebia, otchizna dorogaia, / Opolchentsy dvinulis' v pokhod. / Bili nemtsa pradedy pod Pskovom, / Ot Berlina brali my kliuchi / Razob'em my psov-fashistov snova - / Ne uidut ot smerti palachi. / Dni voiny surovye nastali, / Do pobedy bydem voevat' / My gotovy vse, tovarishch Stalin, / Krai rodimy grud'iu ostoiat'!*

Teutonic Knights at Lake Peipus, near Pskov, in 1242.<sup>302</sup> Similarly, Tsfasman's 1941 composition, "Death to Enemies" (*Smert' vragam*) also blends pre-war military bravado with tsarist military history. The second verse boasts that "We beat Napoleon with oak/  
And now that we're fighting/ With the formidable force of steel/ We will sweep away the Nazis forever!"<sup>303</sup>

The collapsing of Soviet identity into Russian national identity occurred in other jazz songs over the course of the war. Leonid Utesov recalled that one of his most popular wartime songs was "Warrior Fantasy" (*Bogatyr'skaia fantaziia*), a medley of songs about the Russian soldier throughout history. It incorporated not only jazz interpretations of Civil War songs, but also songs about pre-revolutionary national heroes like Aleksandr Nevskii, the prince who led the Russian forces at Lake Peipus, and Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, the hero-general of the Napoleonic wars.<sup>304</sup>

As Utesov claimed, "Warrior Fantasy" received a warm reception from some quarters, particularly from commanding officers and *politruki*. This is unsurprising given their responsibilities towards soldier morale and ideological consciousness. During his tour of the Volkhovskii Front in May 1943, Utesov received several messages from commanders thanking him for his concerts. One division commander told Utesov that "Warrior Fantasy" reminded him that "we are Russian soldiers, custodians of the great

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<sup>302</sup> While the Russian army had fought against the Germans near Pskov during World War I as well, the reference to great-grandfathers (*prodedy*) as opposed to simply grandfathers or fathers suggests that the song refers to the thirteenth-century battle.

<sup>303</sup> GARF 6903, op. 14, d. 1, ll. 121, 145, 335, 433. "Smert' vragam," Sovmusic.ru, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.sovmusic.ru/text.php?fname=smert>. The lyrics quoted state: *Bonaparta my bili dub'em/ A teper' boevoi/ Groznoi siloi stal'noi/ My fashistov naveki smetem!*

<sup>304</sup> Leonid Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!* (Moskva: Vagrius, 2000), 252–253.

ancient (*drevnego*) armies.” The frontline newspaper *Towards the Decisive Blow* (*V reshaiushchii boi*) also praised the song’s capacity to “revive for audiences the glorious path of Russian arms.”<sup>305</sup> Intriguingly, in the hundreds of surviving letters that Utesov received from soldiers and civilians during the war, none make any reference to “Warrior’s Fantasy,” though they mention dozens of other songs. This suggests that, while high-ranking officers and those in charge of political education may have liked the song (or at least gave them impression that they liked it), few common soldiers considered it a favorite.

Utesov’s 1942 hit, “Baron fon der Pshik,” represents a more broadly popular expression of Russian nationalism in Utesov’s repertoire. In this satirical song, which one historian equated to the American Spike Jones’s “Der Führer’s Face,” a metaphorical German baron expresses his desire to feast on Russian back fat (*shpig*).<sup>306</sup> On his way to Stalingrad, however, the baron is stopped:

Baron fon der Pshik  
Forgot about Russian bayonets  
But the bayonets did not forget to strike the baron  
And the gallant fon der Pshik  
Fell upon Russian bayonets  
And now there is not Russian, but German back fat<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 860, ll. 17, 21. (Letters and commander certificates on L.O. Utesov’s performances on the front, 1943-1945).

<sup>306</sup> Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 104.

<sup>307</sup> *Baron fon der Pshik / zabyt pro russkii shtyk / A shtyk bit' baronov ne otyk / I bravnyi fon der Pshik / Popal na russkii shtyk / Ne russkii, a nemetskii vyshel shpig.*

The reference to “Russian” as opposed to “Soviet” bayonets (as well as the reference to a “German” as opposed to a “fascist” or “Nazi” baron), and the implication that only ethnic Russians defended Stalingrad, are notable examples of how some wartime jazz songs appealed to Great Russian nationalism in an attempt to motivate Red Army soldiers.

Although jazz artists made reference to Russia rather than the Soviet Union in their songs, they rarely embraced ethnic folk music the way some groups had before the war. While many other musical ensembles and artists like Lidiia Ruslanova performed folk songs during the war, especially Russian ones, jazz artists generally did not. Of the dozens of jazz recordings released during the war (almost all of which were performed by the jazz orchestras of Utesov, Shul’zhenko, Tsfasman, Iakov Skomorovskii, Eddie Rosner, or Nikolai Minkh), none are strictly folk songs.<sup>308</sup> It is unclear why this is the case – perhaps because they considered jazz to be an urban music that did not rely on folk themes. They may also have recognized that, given the ethnic diversity of their audiences, non-folk music would have been more universally accessible. It may also have been because there was less pressure on jazz artists to employ folk themes than had been the case prior to 1941.

Two exceptions to this pattern may be found in both “Baron fon der Pshik” and another Utesov song, “Song about Nazis” (*Pesenka o natsistakh*). Both songs utilize Jewish folk melodies as a means of subtly poking fun at the Germans. Although, lyrically, “Baron fon der Pshik” mentions Russia, the melody is adapted from Sholom Secunda’s 1932 American-Yiddish hit “Bei Mir Bist Du Shein”, which began appearing

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<sup>308</sup> There is one reference to a Soviet radio broadcast of an Utesov recording entitled “Cossack song,” but this was in late October of 1941 and the recording had likely been made before the war. GARF f. 6903, op. 14, d. 1, l. 435.



in Soviet repertoires in the late 1930s and draws heavily on musical motifs that originated among East European Jews (Secunda was himself was born in Ukraine). Similarly, “Song About Nazis” is an adaptation of Utesov’s early hit “From an Odessan Prison.” However, instead of making reference to Odessan criminal culture, Utesov skewers the Nazi leadership. The song, which now begins with the line ‘From a Berlin prison...’ is a conversation between Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels about conquering the world, rather than between two Jewish bandits on the run from the law. Hitler says that he will conquer the world “with a tank in one hand, and a picklock in the other,” the picklock being an allusion to the song’s original thieving characters. The song then concludes with Hitler deciding to refer to himself as a national-socialist rather than what he is, a thief. This reinterpretation of the song served a double purpose for Utesov. Not only did it ridicule the Nazis through the idiom of Odessan Jewish music, but because the song equates thievery and Nazism, Utesov’s parodying performance distanced him even further from the “criminal song” repertoire he had been criticized for early in his career.

### **Hometown as Homeland: The Case of Odessa**

While some wartime jazz songs equated patriotism with Russian nationalism, some of the most enduring jazz songs of the war depicted specific localities over the breadth of Soviet territory and transposed patriotism onto local communities. Odessa, more than any other city or locale, fulfilled this role. Multiple songs about Odessa or that obliquely mention Odessa appeared throughout the war. This raises the question of why Odessa should have such a prominent place in wartime jazz. Though one of the largest cities in the USSR and a key port on the Black Sea, the city was neither as populous nor

as historically significant as, for example, Kiev. It also lacked the strategic significance of other cities like Sevastopol, the main anchorage for the Black Sea Fleet. Nevertheless, Odessa became the cultural counterpoint to Moscow, which had successfully repelled a German attack, and Leningrad, which heroically endured a 900-day siege. As Utesov remembered, “We were proud of Leningrad and proud of Moscow, but we mourned for Odessa.”<sup>309</sup> The myriad Odessa-born cultural figures, including songwriters like Modest Tabachnikov and performers like Vladimir Koralli and Iakov Skomorovskii, felt a keen sense of loss when the city was captured by Axis forces in 1941, especially considering the city’s large Jewish population and rich Jewish cultural tradition. To be sure, there were songs about other communities, especially Leningrad.<sup>310</sup> But in spite of these references, Odessa took pride of place in the geography of wartime jazz.

While some songs about Odessa, notably the collaboration between Tsfasman and singer Mark Bernes, “Barges Full of Mullet” (*Shalandy, polnye kefali*), offered a nostalgic vignette of peacetime Odessa, most other references to Odessa in wartime jazz highlight its status as a lost city. In 1943, Klavdiia Shul’zhenko and her jazz orchestra recorded “We are Sailors From Odessa” (*My iz Odessy moriaki*), which was composed by Iurii Miliutin and written by Viktor Gusev (both Muscovites). The song is sung from the perspective of a group of Odessan sailors who fought in defense of the city. In the song’s first chorus, after abandoning the city, the sailors encounter first the trees of the forests

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<sup>309</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!*, 258.

<sup>310</sup> For example, the only amateur jazz recording from the war featured a Red Army jazz ensemble performing “Song About Leningrad” which includes the refrain, “My Leningrad, my Leningrad, beloved motherland.” “Song About Leningrad (Pesnia o Leningrade),” Russian-records.com, accessed March 8, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=18323](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=18323).

far beyond the city limits, then in subsequent choruses, they meet elderly villagers whom they liberate and then, finally, the German “devils” they fight, who do not understand their power. Each refrain ends with these different groups asking the sailors, “Where are you from?” and the sailors’ response “We are sailors from Odessa.”

The song not only conflates Odessa with other lost territories, it conflates hometown and home. In the final two stanzas, the singer imagines the day he liberates the city:

I don't know whether in fall or in foggy winter  
We will return to our city, our desired city  
But I know my city, my dear old house  
The time is coming – we will come to you!

And the merry sound of the surf will greet us  
We will knock on the windows of our own homes  
“Where did you come from?” “We came straight from the field of battle!”  
The sailors have arrived in Odessa.<sup>311</sup>

One could easily imagine a listener, whether a soldier or an evacuated civilian hearing this song and replacing Odessa with any number of communities now occupied by the Germans.

The most famous wartime song about Odessa was Utesov's 1942 hit, “Mishka From Odessa” (*Odessit Mishka*), which was composed by Mikhail Valovats and based on the poem “You're an Odessan, Mishka” by the Muscovite poet Vladimir Dykhovichnyi. The song tells of an Odessan sailor in the Black Sea fleet named Mishka (short for Mikhail) who fights in defense of his beloved home town and witnesses its destruction.

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<sup>311</sup> *Ia ne znaiu, osen'iu il' zimoi tumannoi / My vernemsia v gorod nash, gorod nash zhelannyi / No ia znaiu, gorod moi, milyi staryi dom / Eto vremia blizitsia – my k tebe pridem / I vstretit nas veselyi shum priboia / My postuchim v okno svoe rodnoe. / “Otkuda vy?” “My priamo s polia boia!” / Prishli v Odessu moriaki!*

As he fires his machine gun at the enemy, he watches helplessly as the “green chestnut trees” of his youth become “drooping chestnut trees” and then “scorched chestnut trees.” The chorus of the song is a phrase his mother told him as a child, which he repeats to himself while defending Odessa, and which a commissar tells him when the city is lost and Mishka is emotionally distraught:

You're an Odessan, Mishka, and that means  
That you are afraid of neither grief nor trouble  
After all, you're a sailor, Mishka, and a sailor never cries  
And never loses his good spirits<sup>312</sup>

In the final verse, Mishka returns to Odessa and its “blooming chestnut trees” in triumph as a member of the Odessa Guards Battalion. Overcome with emotion when he enters the city, Mishka finds himself on the verge of tears once more, but here the final chorus states:

Though you're an Odessan, Mishka, and that means  
That you are afraid of neither grief nor trouble  
After all, you're a sailor, Mishka, and a sailor does not cry  
But this time, it is right to cry, no trouble.<sup>313</sup>

Both “Mishka From Odessa” and “We are Sailors From Odessa,” depart from the general pre-war understanding of jazz as a jolly and up-beat musical format. Conversely, these two songs painfully remind listeners that one of largest cities in the Soviet Union had been captured and that its conquest had separated many Odessan natives from their

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<sup>312</sup> *Ty Odessit, Mishka, a eto znachit / Chto ne strashny tebe ni gore, ni beda / Ved' ty moriak, Mishka, moriak ne plachet / I ne teriaet bodrost' dukha nikogda.*

<sup>313</sup> *Khot' odessit Mishka, a eto znachit /... / No v etot raz poplakat', pravo, ne beda!*

beloved home. Crucially, both songs also offer hope and optimism that if people keep fighting, the city would be re-taken and the Odessan natives might return home.

While both songs proved popular and enduring components of wartime repertoires, “Mishka From Odessa” touched a particular nerve. Utesov was inundated with letters from soldiers and civilians who wanted to tell him how much they liked the song and, in some cases, to ask for the music and lyrics so that amateur frontline and civilian jazz ensembles could incorporate the pieces.<sup>314</sup> Many of these letters were from Odessans themselves. In the first month after the song’s release, Utesov claimed to have received over 200 letters from Odessans named Mikhail.<sup>315</sup> In some cases, Odessans’ affinity for the city was stronger than their affinity for the Soviet Union as a whole. One letter came from a group of Odessa-born officers who wrote that “Mishka from Odessa” reminded them of their “beloved city” and they often sang it in their free time to remind themselves of the “fascist beasts” who occupied their hometown.<sup>316</sup> In another letter, an infantry lieutenant wrote to ask for the lyrics to “Mishka From Odessa”: “Perhaps this is impertinent of me,” he wrote, “but the patriotism of an Odessan prompted me to write to you with this request...” The lieutenant ended his letter with the phrase, “For the beloved Motherland, for our native Odessa!”<sup>317</sup>

It was not only Odessans who wrote to Utesov to articulate the ways that the song helped them in their fight against the Germans. For some listeners, Odessa became a

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<sup>314</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 749, ll. 49, 68. (Letters from fans to L.O. Utesov, 1943)

<sup>315</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!*, 260.

<sup>316</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 749, l. 7.

<sup>317</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 749, l. 15.

stand-in for other Soviet hometowns that had fallen or been destroyed by the Axis forces. One frontline soldier wrote to say that the song left a deep impression on him, even though he was from Stalingrad, not Odessa.<sup>318</sup> In another moving letter, a young girl asked Utesov to perform the song on his next radio performance because it reminded her of her own hometown of Sevastopol’:

When I hear that song, I always remember Papa. My father defended Sevastopol’...and there, probably, he died. When I hear that song, I clearly see Sevastopol’, I see the battle: bombs whistling, shells exploding...It is not strange that a song about an Odessan reminds me of Sevastopol’. My mind is not that far from that city.... I know that you’re an Odessan. But to me you are now closer to Sevastopol’...and I think that you will not reject my request.<sup>319</sup>

The repeated references to Odessa inspired feelings of not only “Odessan patriotism”, but also of pride in whatever location was meaningful to a given listener. Jazz artists, therefore, offered listeners a conception of the homeland that had geographic specificity - where the listener knew the streets and people, which were easier to fight for than a broad, impersonal, and altogether abstract homeland.

### **Home Front as Homeland: Loved Ones**

The allusions to home and family that feature in both “Sailors” and “Mishka”, indicate another prominent theme in wartime jazz – that of the home and, specifically, loved ones and personal relationships. The desire to protect one’s family proved to be a strong motivation for men who joined the Red Army and jazz repertoires encouraged this

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<sup>318</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 749, l. 13.

<sup>319</sup> RGALI f 3005, op. 1, d. 749, l. 30.

sentiment.<sup>320</sup> The bonds between lovers took on new significance during the war as millions of partners left to fight on the front. Although the experience of combat estranged soldiers from their loved ones both physically and emotionally and, based on their letters home, many of these soldiers had already given up hope that they would survive the war, wartime jazz spoke to this separation and depicted the loved one left behind (always female, despite large number of female combatants in the Red Army) as a talisman who could help her soldier fight more effectively, even protecting him from death.<sup>321</sup> These songs also exhorted those loved ones at home to stay faithful since it was soldiers' belief in their fidelity that allowed them to carry on. In this sense, romantic relationships became a kind of homeland and, for many soldiers, the most tangible motivation to fight.

As noted earlier, this trope of the emotional connections between male soldiers on the front and their female loved ones at home was well-established in Soviet propaganda and propagandists conflated love of home and love of homeland, with Russia/Soviet Union as *motherland* and Stalin as the loving father.<sup>322</sup> However, while this body of propaganda emphasized mothers, wartime jazz songs rarely mentioned mothers, preferring to evoke the emotional bond between romantic partners. Even in jazz songs where the loved one was a mother, it was her romantic partnership that was privileged.

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<sup>320</sup> Catherine Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat in the Red Army, 1939-45," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, 2006, 312.

<sup>321</sup> Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat," 312.

<sup>322</sup> Kirschenbaum, "Our Cities," 832-838.

Songs in this vein were not entirely new to Soviet audiences. Not only did several pre-war jazz ensembles perform romantic songs, but a few songs about the separation of soldiers and their loved ones were published and recorded in the late 1930s. The most enduring of these songs was Matvei Blanter and Mikhail Isakovskii's "Katiusha", which was first performed in 1938 by Viktor Knushevitskii's State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR. The song became so popular during the war that the "Katiusha" rocket launcher was named in its honor. Whereas the above songs about Odessa are steeped in local specificity, including references to the city's distinctive chestnut trees, neighborhoods, and the sea, "Katiusha" is deliberately generic, allowing listeners to embed themselves in the song's narrative:

Apple and pear trees were blooming  
Mist hung on the river  
Katiusha walked out along the banks  
On the high and steep banks

She was walking, singing a song  
About a grey Steppe eagle  
About her true love  
Whose letters she was keeping

Oh, you, song, little song of a maiden  
Head for the bright sun  
And reach for the soldier on the far-away border  
Send greetings from Katiusha.

May he remember a simple girl  
May he hear how she sings  
May he preserve our native land  
Just as Katiusha preserves her love.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> *Rastsvetali iabloni i grushi / Poplyli tumany nad rekoi / Vykhdila na bereg Katiusha / Na vysokoi bereg na krutoi / Vykhdila, pesniu zavodila / Pro stepnogo, sizogo orla / Pro togo, kotorogo liubila / Pro togo, ch'i pisma beregla / Oi ty, pesnia, pesenka devich'ia / Ty leti za iasnym solntsem vlsed / I boitsu na dal'nem pogranych'e / Ot Katiushi peredai privet / Pust' on vspomnit devushku prostuiu / Pust' islyshit, kak ona poet / Pust' on zemliu berezhet rodnuuu / A liubov' Katiusha zberezhet.*



Other songs of love between soldier and family became staples of Soviet wartime jazz. One of Aleksandr Tsfasman's most popular songs was "Dark is the Night" (*Temnaia noch*). Like "Barges Full of Mullet" the song became famous when singer Mark Bernes performed it in the 1942 film *Two Soldiers*. In this song, a soldier describes the cruel and deadly environment in which lives on the steppe, with bullets whizzing overhead and the wind whistling through barbed wire. He contrasts this scene with the image of his wife sitting at home in tears next to the cradle that holds their infant child. The singer then states that it is her love that sustains him in his fight. She is his talisman in battle:

I believe in you, my dearest friend  
This truth protects me from the bullets of the dark night  
It gladdens me, I am at peace in this deathly struggle  
I know that you will meet me with love, no matter what happens  
Death is not frightening, we have met more than once on the steppe  
...  
You wait for me and do not sleep next to the crib  
And, therefore, I know that nothing will happen to me.<sup>324</sup>

Although Bernes "played" the song on guitar in the film, he recorded it in the studio with Aleksandr Tsfasman and his jazz orchestra providing a minimalist musical backdrop.<sup>325</sup> Tsfasman's group also performed this song when they toured the Central Front in 1942 and, as one bandmate recalled, soldiers came up to them after their shows

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<sup>324</sup> *Veriu v tebia, v doroguiu podrugu moiu / Eto vera ot puli menia temnoi noch'iu khranila / Radostno mne, ia spokoen v smertel'nom boiu / Znaiu vstretish' s liubov'iu menia, chto b so mnoi ni sluchilos' / ... / Ty menia zhdesht' i u detskoj krovatki ne spish' / I poetomu zhaiu: so mnoi nichego ne sluchitsia!*

<sup>325</sup> "Temnaia noch'," Russian-records.com, accessed March 7, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=24371&l=russian](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=24371&l=russian).

to express their gratitude for performing the song, sometimes with tears in their eyes. One officer thanked them and said, “I felt as if I was back home!”<sup>326</sup>

Arguably the most famous love song of the war was Klavdiia Shul’zhenko’s rendition of “Blue Kerchief” (*Sinii platochek*). The song is an example of how pre-war jazz songs were reimagined to make them relevant to the realities of war. The song was originally composed by the Polish-Jewish songwriting duo of Iurii (Jerzy) Petersburgskii and Genrykh Gol’d for their own jazz orchestra before the war.<sup>327</sup> In their rendition the blue kerchief is a sentimental image of a relationship amidst the changing seasons. However, in 1942, Mikhail Maksimov, a soldier and journalist, wrote new lyrics and gave them to Shul’zhenko. Maksimov reimagined the blue kerchief as a symbol of the bond between a husband and wife who are separated by the war.<sup>328</sup>

I remember how on that memorable evening  
The kerchief fell from your shoulders  
How you walked with me  
And promised  
To treasure the blue kerchief  
And although my dear, beloved one  
Is not with me today  
I know that, with love  
You hide the dear kerchief  
At the head of your bed

Receiving your letters  
I hear your living voice  
And between the lines

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<sup>326</sup> Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman*, 54.

<sup>327</sup> RGALI f. 656, op. 3, d. 4781, l. 7. (Repertoire for Gol’d and Petersburgskii Jazz Orchestra, 1940-1941). Prior to Eddie Rozner’s immigration in 1939, Petersburgskii and Gol’d’s orchestra doubled as the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra.

<sup>328</sup> David MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People: Affect, Emotion, and Celebrity in the Russian Popular Song* (Montreal, QB: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 154-55.

The blue kerchief  
Again arises before me  
And often, in battle  
Your image accompanies me  
And I feel that your loving gaze  
Is constantly near me

How many treasured kerchiefs  
We all carry in our greatcoats  
Tender words  
Girlish shoulders  
Remembered in the heat of battle  
It is for our dear  
Desired, loved ones  
That the machine gun hammers away  
For the blue kerchief  
That lay on dear shoulders.<sup>329</sup>

Impressed by these new lyrics, Shul'zhenko immediately incorporated them into her repertoire, an indication that frontline artists could sometimes circumvent the Soviet regime's extensive censorship bureaucracy. Reflecting on why she thought the song was worth performing, Shul'zhenko stated that the song reflected the sentiments and emotions of frontline soldiers. "I tried to express what I saw and learned in meetings with *frontoviks* (frontline soldiers)," she wrote. "That simple song seemed to me extraordinarily emotionally intense because it carried great feeling – from tenderness and devotion towards loved ones to hatred of the enemy."<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> *Pomniu, kak v pomiatnyi vecher/ Padal platochek tvoi s plech/ Kak provozhala/ I obeshchala/ Sinii platochek sberech'/ I pust' so mnoi/ Net segodnia liubimoi, rodnoi/ Znaiu, s liubov'iu/ Ty k izgolov'iu/ Priachesh' plato dorogoi/ Pis'ma tvoi poluchaia/ Slyshu ia golos zhivoi/ I mezhdu strochek/ Sinii platochek/ Snova vstaet predo mnoi/ I chasto v boi/ Provozhaet menia obraz tvoi/ Chuvstvuiu riadom/ Liubiashchim vzgliadom/ Ty postoianno so mnoi/ Skol'ko zavetnykh platochkov/ Nosim v shineliakh s soboi!/ Nezhnye rechi/ Devich'i plechi/ Pomnim v strade boevoi/ Za nikh, rodnykh/ Zhelannykh, liubimykh takikh/ Strochit pulemetchik/ Za sinii platochek/ Chto byl na plechakh dorigikh.*

<sup>330</sup> Shul'zhenko, "Kogda vy sprosite menia....," 94-95.

Shul'zhenko's hunch proved correct as "Blue Kerchief" resonated with Soviet audiences throughout the war and after. Indeed, "Blue Kerchief" was her one contribution to *Concert for the Front*. One frontline newspaper stated that she sometimes had to perform the song two to three times in one concert in order to satisfy soldier demand.<sup>331</sup> K. Adezhmov, who worked for the All-Union Radio station in Moscow during the war, recalled that the song was particularly popular amongst listeners and Shul'zhenko's jazz orchestra featured in the celebratory radio program that aired after the battle of Stalingrad.<sup>332</sup> Soldiers and pilots went into battle with literal or metaphorical "blue kerchiefs" that represented their own loved ones. At least one soldier was rumored to have charged into battle shouting "For the Blue Kerchief!" instead of the prescribed "For the Motherland! For Stalin!"<sup>333</sup> The song resonated on the home front as well. When Shul'zhenko and her group went into the studio to record "Blue Kerchief", they had to scrap the first recording because the engineer's tears fell on the wax recording disc.<sup>334</sup> Though the song lacks any explicit reference to Russia or a specific locale, it evokes powerful images of what many soldiers considered to be their own "little homelands."

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<sup>331</sup> Shul'zhenko, "Kogda vy sprosite menia....," 95.

<sup>332</sup> Irina Andreevna Medved (sost.), *Muzyka v bor'be s fashizmom: Sbornik statei*, (Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1985), 71.

<sup>333</sup> MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People*, 155.

<sup>334</sup> MacFadyen, *Songs for Fat People*, 156.

## Homeland in the Trenches: Comrades-in-Arms

It was not only with loved ones at home that soldiers developed emotional bonds. Through the shared experience on the front, Red Army soldiers developed close relationships with their comrades. Even though life expectancy on the front was short (at Stalingrad in winter 1942, average soldier life expectancy is estimated to have been 24 hours) and although friendships were complicated by swirling rumors of spies and informants in the ranks, many veterans recall that this did not stop them from developing close friendships – a necessity in tank or bomber crews, where trust and teamwork were paramount. These bonds were just as strong, if not stronger, than those with loved ones at home, and some soldiers married into the families of their fallen comrades out of love for them and not for their spouses.<sup>335</sup>

Wartime jazz also spoke of this bond between comrades. Tsfasman's orchestra, for example, collaborated with acclaimed soloist Efrem Flaks to record the Lebedev-Kumach/Anatoly Lepin waltz "Only at the Front" (*Tol'ko na fronte*).<sup>336</sup> After accentuating the importance of music on the front in the first half of the song, the second half shifts to discuss relationships between *frontoviki*:

Only at the front will you prove  
Your own best feelings  
Only at the front will you measure  
The power and strength of love

The warrior's love for his own  
Is truest of all

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<sup>335</sup> Merridale, "Culture, Ideology and Combat," 321-322.

<sup>336</sup> "Only at the Frontline (Tol'ko na fronte), song," Russian-records.com, accessed March 8, 2017, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=34720](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=34720).

Who thought that the heart  
Hardens in war?  
Only we can keep  
Friendships to the end

In battle, friends boldly lay down  
Their whole souls for their friends  
It is impossible to splinter nor break  
Wartime friendships

Only we can keep  
Friendships to the end<sup>337</sup>

The song states that the most authentic relationships that frontline soldiers will ever have is with each other. It is the combat experience and the reliance upon each other that forges this friendship. From this perspective, it is no wonder, then, that many soldiers felt estranged from their loved ones at home. Such relationships felt superficial compared to the hardened and proven love between comrades-in-arms. “Only on the Front” implies that soldiers will prove themselves to be “authentic” human beings by fighting, not for an abstract ideal or homeland, but for each other.

Another popular song in this vein was “Let’s Have a Smoke” (*Davai zakurim*), written by Modest Tabachnikov and Ilia Frenkel’. Although the song was not written as a jazz song, it became a staple in Klavdiia Shul’zhenko’s repertoire. According to Shul’zhenko, the song successfully reflected the complex mindset of the frontline soldier. To write a song like “Let’s Have a Smoke,” she stated, one must “live next to the soldier

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<sup>337</sup> *Tol’ko na fronte proverish’/ Luchshie chuvstva svoi/ Tol’ko na fronte izmerish’/ Silu I krepost’ liubvi/ Voin vsekh vernee liubit/ Miluiu svoiu/ Kto pridumal, chto grubeiut/ Na voine serdtsa?/ Tol’lko nash khranit’ umeiut/ Druzhbu do kontsa!/ V bitve za druga vsiu dushu/ Smelo polozhat druz’ia/ Ni raskolot’, ni narushit’/ Druzhby voennoi nel’zia/ Tol’ko nash khranit’ umeiut/ Druzhbu do kontsa!*

and eat a pood of salt with him” as Tabachnikov and Frenkel’ did.<sup>338</sup> Tobacco (*makhorka*) was a prized commodity on the Eastern Front and, according to Brandon Schechter, “central to the culture of the Red Army.” Tobacco pouches (*kisety*) were among the most valued objects in a soldier’s rucksack and the sharing of tobacco between soldiers was a significant act of socialization on the front.<sup>339</sup>

The song is sung from the perspective of one soldier to another on the Southwestern Front and touches not only on comradely bonds, but also on soldiers’ dreams of the war’s eventual end. “Let’s Have a Smoke” encapsulates many of the other themes discussed above, including connections with loved ones at home and with geographically specific locales. The singer recognizes the grander significance of their westward march and acknowledges that the history books will remember their liberation of Ukraine, but what he will remember best is sharing a cigarette with a fellow soldier:

About our campaigns, about our battles with the enemy  
Long shall people sing the songs  
And often in the evening, with friends gathered ‘round  
At any time, we shall remember these days.

About the firelights  
About friends and comrades  
Anywhere, anytime we will talk  
I will remember the infantry  
And our native company  
And you, because you gave me a cigarette  
Let’s have a smoke, one comrade with another

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<sup>338</sup> Shul’zhenko, “*Kogda vy sprositate menia...*”, 100. Shul’zhenko here refers to the old Russian proverb that, to truly know someone, you must “eat a *pood* (an archaic Russian unit of measurement roughly equal to 36 lbs.) of salt with him.” Tabachnikov was the artistic director of multiple frontline ensembles and, therefore, spent a great deal of time with soldiers. Frenkel’ fought in the Winter War against Finland in 1940 and served as a frontline correspondent after 1941.

<sup>339</sup> Brandon Schechter, *Government Issue: The Material Culture of Everyday Life in the Red Army, 1941-1945* (unpublished manuscript), 238-239.

Let's have a smoke, my comrade

We shall again meet in Odessa, but as hosts  
The stars of the Black Sea will shine upon us.  
Glorious Kakhovka, the city of Nikolaev  
At any time, we shall remember these days

And when the Germans are no longer in sight  
And we come home to our loved ones again  
We will recall how we marched westward through Ukraine  
At any time, we shall remember these days<sup>340</sup>

Shul'zhenko's orchestra performed the song in a swinging, big band style.

Shul'zhenko's performances were notable for their gender-bending nature. Although she was technically a member of the Red Army, Shul'zhenko was asked by a regimental commander in 1941 to not perform in uniform since soldiers would prefer to be reminded of peace time, when women did not perform military service. From that point on, Shul'zhenko only performed in pristine, feminine civilian clothing.<sup>341</sup> This accentuated femininity made her decision to perform a song about male sociability highly unusual—especially considering her husband, singer Vladimir Koralli co-led the orchestra with her. To add to the gender-bending nature of her performance, Shul'zhenko would roll a cigarette while performing the song for troops and, just before the last refrains of “Let's have a smoke,” she inserted a dramatic pause to lick the cigarette paper, the last step

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<sup>340</sup> *O pokhodakh nashikh, o boiakh s vragami/ Dolgo budut liudi pesni raspevat'/ I v krugu s druž'iami chasto vecherami/ Eti dni kogda-nibud' my budem vspominat'/ Ob ogniakh-pozharishchakh/ O druž'iakh-tovarishchakh/ Gde-nibud' kogda-nibud' my budem govorit'/ Vspomniu ia pekhotu/ I rodnuiu rotu/ I tebia za to, chto ty dal mne zakurit'/ Davai zakurim, tovarishch po odnoi/ Davai zakurim tovarishch moi/ Nas opiat' Odessa vstretit kak khoziaev/ Zvezdy Chernomor'ia budut nam siiat'/ Slavnuuu Kakhovku, gorod Nikolaev/ Eti dni kogda-nibud' my budem vspominat'/ A kogda ne stanet nemtsev I v pomine/ I k svoim liubimym my pridem opiat'/ Vspomnim, kak na Zapad shli po Ukraine/ Eti dni kogda-nibud' my budem vspominat'.* Though there are other verses, these are the ones that Shul'zhenko and her orchestra included in their recording of the song.

<sup>341</sup> Shul'zhenko, “*Kogda vy sprosite menia...*,” 86.



before lighting it. Shul'zhenko became so adept at this pantomime that soldiers were convinced that she actually smoked and would come offer her cigarettes after her performances.<sup>342</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Between 1941 and 1945, Soviet jazz musicians offered their services to the party-state and to their fellow citizens in the drive to repel and defeat Nazi Germany. These artists strove to speak both to and for Soviet soldiers and civilians in order to keep up their fighting spirits. They realized early on that, to do so, they had to abandon or modify their old repertoires and embrace new songs that would instill audiences with patriotic fervor. Just as American wartime jazz songs like the Andrews Sisters' "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy From Company B" and Nat "King" Cole's "D-Day" sought to mobilize American soldiers and civilians, Soviet Jazz composers and performers crafted new repertoires to achieve the same ends.

Jazz artists knew that not all audience members would respond to the same songs in the same way. Ensembles offered an array of narratives that evoked different interpretations of what the homeland was and what it meant to be patriotic. Some of these songs drew on the Russocentrism prevalent in many other forms of wartime propaganda and equated patriotism with love of the Russian nation and its history, even that of the tsarist era. Other songs equated the homeland not with an abstract concept such as a nation, but with more intelligible, local imagery such as the home town or community,

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<sup>342</sup> Shul'zhenko, "*Kogda vy sprosite menia...*," 101.

where a listener knew the people, the streets, and the natural surroundings. Still other songs divorced the homeland from any geographic specificity and embedded the concept in the relationships that (male) soldiers cultivated both with their girlfriends and wives and with each other on the front.

In an effort to respond to the needs and desires of their audiences, jazz ensembles performed songs that touched on each of these themes. The wartime Soviet jazz public sphere, therefore, featured a limited array of concepts and sentiments with which audiences could engage to determine for themselves what constituted the “homeland” and what was so “patriotic” about the Great Patriotic War. This cycle of narrative production and engagement exemplifies the dialogical nature of propaganda, with jazz artists offering narratives of patriotism, receiving a response from audiences, and tweaking these narratives or persisting with them if they were effective.

The years between 1941 and 1945 proved to be the least controversial for the Soviet jazz public sphere. Compared to the previous decade, there was minimal resistance to the genre and a general acceptance that, if audiences liked jazz so much and it could be used to mobilize them to fight, there was no reason to object. There were, after all, far more pressing matters at hand. By 1945 it appeared that jazz artists had proved their loyalty and value to the Soviet state. With the United States now a tried and true ally, it seemed as though, to quote Irving Berlin, it was “nothin’ but blue skies from now on” for Soviet jazz. Nothing could have been further from the truth. As the next chapter shows, the postwar years marked the darkest period for Soviet jazz and its public sphere.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### From Public to Counterpublic: Jazz under Late Stalinism

#### Introduction

In 1947, Soiuzmul'tfilm, the Soviet animation studio, released *Quartet*, a short cartoon directed by Aleksandr Ivanov with music by jazz composer and bandleader Aleksandr Varlamov.<sup>343</sup> A remake of a similar film from 1935, and based on the Ivan Krylov poem of the same name, it tells the story of a monkey, goat, donkey, and bear who hear the singing of a nightingale. Inspired by the beauty of the bird's song, the four decide to form a musical ensemble of their own, even though none of them know how to play their instruments. In frustration, they enroll in the "Forest Conservatory" and earn certificates in their respective instruments. In the finale of the film, the four animals play an instrumental jazz song as they march through the forest. Their music is so powerful that it causes trees, sunflowers, mushrooms, and insects to dance with each other. Even the nightingale, who initially tries to out-sing them, is won over and joins the quartet. Finally, the whole forest spins in rhythm and transforms into a woman in Russian folk dress, dancing all the while to the quartet's tune. The film is an ode to the popularity and power of jazz music and suggests that, in skilled hands, jazz could literally move the earth.

Two years later, the same studio released *The Stranger's Voice* (*Chuzhoi golos*), another cartoon about anthropomorphic animals directed by Ivan Ivanov-Vano. In this film, the birds of the forest gather nightly to hear the beautiful singing of the nightingale.

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<sup>343</sup> At the time, Varlamov was languishing in prison, having been charged with libel in 1943.

One day a magpie arrives “from abroad” (*za granitsy*) and, upon hearing the nightingale’s song, dismisses it as boring and passé. She decides to hold a concert of her own that will showcase the latest in foreign birdsong. For the concert, the magpie dresses as a firebird, but the music that comes out of the magpie’s mouth is raucous, big band style jazz, edited so that only loud horn bursts and glissando trumpet runs can be heard. A few birds are won over (especially a deaf turkey), praising the magpie’s technique (a common source of praise for jazz musicians) or how modern she sounds. Most of the birds, however are incensed at the magpie’s lack of artistic merit and believe it has no place in their forest. They heckle the magpie and dive-bomb her until she flees not only the stage, but the forest entirely. The birds who had praised the magpie, meanwhile, go into hiding. The film ends with the nightingale restored to his place as maestro of the forest and the narrator saying “Let this fable be a lesson for all kinds of birds, not just magpies.”

The stark contrast between these two animated films highlights the dramatic and traumatic changes that befell the Soviet jazz community in the years between the Allied victory in 1945 and Stalin’s death in 1953. While rumblings of anti-jazz sentiment could be heard as early as 1946, the campaign against jazz intensified in 1948, when jazz was banned from stage, screen, and radio. The public sphere that had developed around jazz, wherein audiences, musicians, critics, and bureaucrats could articulate competing views and opinions about Soviet society was snuffed out.

Despite the regime’s turn against jazz, many Soviet citizens continued to engage with the genre. Soviet and foreign jazz records still circulated widely within Soviet territory and musicians still performed publicly even though they risked punishment. Jazz music remained linked to social activities, especially dancing, in parks, clubs, and

restaurants. Most surprisingly, jazz did not simply persist, it thrived in many of the prison labor camps (collectively referred to as the Gulag) scattered across the Soviet North and East. How do we explain jazz's persistence amid intense persecution in the last years of Stalin's reign?

Aleksei Yurchak provides one possible explanatory framework in his concept of living *vnye* – literally “outside.” Yurchak argues that while Stalin was alive, he acted as the sole interpreter of Marxist-Leninist ideology. When he died, no one filled this role and thus Soviet discourse and ritual became unmoored from their substantive meaning. This meant that Soviet citizens utilized the language of Soviet ideology and engaged in its rituals, but only to the extent that it did not cause trouble for themselves and their friends. The rest of the time, they could re-interpret the ideology as they saw fit or simply ignore it, expressing neither explicit support for nor explicit opposition toward the Soviet regime. Yurchak refers to this in-between state, of being both “inside” (participating in discourse and ritual) and “outside” (ignoring the regime entirely), as living *vnye*.<sup>344</sup>

The seeds of post-Stalinist *vnye* are evident in the late Stalinist jazz scene. Performers and audiences could play and hear jazz in many, though certainly not all, of the same venues as they had previously. Some jazz artists were protected by benevolent administrators who saw no incompatibility between their roles as functionaries of the Soviet state and their affinity for jazz music. This is particularly evident in the many jazz orchestras scattered across the Gulag archipelago. Ironically, it was here, in the spaces where deviant Soviet citizens were to be reformed and rehabilitated, that jazz musicians

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<sup>344</sup> Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). See the first four chapters, but especially pages 128-133.

could express themselves most freely. This was largely because camp commanders and administrators not only enjoyed the music personally, but also believed, counter to official Soviet rhetoric, it could contribute to prisoner rehabilitation.

Yurchak's thesis, while a valuable reminder not to oversimplify cooperation or non-cooperation in authoritarian societies, is not an entirely adequate explanation for jazz under late Stalinism.<sup>345</sup> For one thing, it was only after Stalin's death that Yurchak's *vnye* space fully came into being. Furthermore, while it is certainly true that, just because Soviet citizens chose to ignore anti-jazz discourse and engage with the genre, they did not oppose the Soviet regime *tout court*, one could not engage with jazz music in the late 1940s and early 1950s and not be aware that doing so marked one as deviant in the eyes of the regime. It is for this reason that, while the late Stalinist jazz scene exhibits some of the characteristics of living *vnye*, it is more of a "proto-*vnye*" than a fully fleshed out version.

Michael Warner provides another way of interpreting the persistence of jazz under late Stalinism through his concept of a "counterpublic." A counterpublic is, according to Warner, "a scene where a dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and in doing so finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as public."<sup>346</sup> Counterpublics are neither simply communities, because participants do not all know each other, nor are they simply subcultures because many subcultures do not necessarily challenge the dominant

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<sup>345</sup> Peter Schmelz, "From Scriabin to Pink Floyd: The ANS Synthesizer and the Politics of Soviet Music between Thaw and Stagnation," in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music in the Sixties*, ed. by Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 256.

<sup>346</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 112.

culture.<sup>347</sup> In this sense, Soviet jazz in the postwar years constituted a counterpublic sphere. Participants in the postwar Soviet jazz scene existed in a subordinate group that, by its very existence, challenged the dominant values and ideas of late Stalinist culture. Because the regime aggressively marginalized jazz music and related activities for which performers and audiences had a strong affinity, jazz fans in the last years of Stalin's life constituted a counterpublic.

There is little evidence that those who listened to or performed jazz music in these years rejected Soviet ideology. Affinity for jazz was not an expression of opposition, but of the belief that the Soviet world could be more than it was and could incorporate ways of thinking and behaving that had, until recently, been perfectly acceptable. As Gleb Tsipursky summarizes, “[jazz fans] were forced onto the cultural margins not from a desire to resist the Soviet system, but because the tightening ideological boundaries in 1948 left them no choice.”<sup>348</sup> The counter-discourse of the Soviet jazz public was oppositional only in the sense that the regime saw it as oppositional and its members can therefore be considered what Tsipursky calls “accidental cultural non-conformists.”<sup>349</sup> The concept of “accidental non-conformism” meshes well with Warner's understanding of a counterpublic and is less confrontational than Nancy Fraser's influential notion of “subaltern counterpublics” in which marginalized groups develop “oppositional

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<sup>347</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 112-124. Warner argues that readers of *Field & Stream* magazine do not encompass the public any more than the queer community, but then enthusiasm for hunting and fishing does not challenge the fundamental values and discourse of the dominant culture in the way that queer interpretations of sexuality and intimacy do.

<sup>348</sup> Gleb Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth in the Early Cold War, 1948-1953,” *The Journal of Musicology* 33 (3), Summer 2016, 335.

<sup>349</sup> Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth,” 335.

interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs,” and which Yurchak rejects as incompatible with the realities of Soviet life.<sup>350</sup>

This chapter outlines the decline of the jazz public sphere and the emergence of the jazz counterpublic sphere and a proto-*vnye* culture. After a brief discussion of why jazz was not a target during the Great Terror of the late 1930s, I show how, through changes in cultural policy and in the way that jazz was depicted in the Soviet press, the genre’s demise during the late 40s also signaled an end to the public sphere that had formed around it. The second part of the chapter will show how, with this sphere closed off, Soviet jazz musicians and fans gravitated towards a way of engaging with jazz and each other that signaled the emergence of a counterpublic and foreshadowed aspects of late socialist life, particularly the concept of living *vnye*.

### **Why the 1940s?: Jazz and the Great Terror**

It is worth briefly discussing why, if jazz was a target of state persecution during the late 1940s, it was *not* a target during the Great Terror of the previous decade. S. Frederick Starr argues that the great debate about jazz that took place in the pages of *Izvestiia* and *Pravda* in November and December 1936 was a prelude to an attempted purge of Soviet jazz – a purge that allegedly failed.<sup>351</sup> Unfortunately, the available evidence does not bear out such a hypothesis. In fact, one could argue that, ironically, the

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<sup>350</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26, 1990, 67. Yurchak discusses Fraser’s counterpublic in *Everything Was Forever*, 117.

<sup>351</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917-1991*, (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994, 157-180.



years of the Terror were something of a peak for Soviet jazz. None other than Leonid Utesov stated that, having been dogged by criticism from the earliest days of his jazz career, his life as a jazz performer became much easier *after* 1936.<sup>352</sup> It was also during this period that the All-Union Radio Jazz Orchestra and the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR were founded. Furthermore, Lazar Kaganovich, a Politburo member who signed several execution orders, was a fan of Utesov and a patron of the All-Union Railways Jazz Orchestra. Even the NKVD Officer school recorded a version of the American jazz standard “Dinah” in 1937.<sup>353</sup> It is difficult to reconcile these events with the narrative that the dark days of the late 1930s were dark days for jazz too.

Although jazz itself was not a target during the Terror, jazz musicians and aficionados did fall victim and were arrested, imprisoned, or shot. Sergei Kolbas’ev, the writer, jazz theorist, and owner of what was believed to be the largest jazz record collection in the USSR, was arrested and supposedly shot in 1937.<sup>354</sup> Bandleader David Geigner was arrested in the middle of a gig at Moscow’s Metropole Hotel on a charge of committing “counter-revolutionary” activities and died in 1938.<sup>355</sup> Dmitri Sof’ianopulo, who formed one of the earliest jazz bands in Rostov-on-Don was arrested on similar

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<sup>352</sup> Leonid Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!*, (Moskva: Vagrius, 2000), 216.

<sup>353</sup> “Dina, fokstrot,” *Russian-records.com*, accessed 31 May 2016, [http://russian-records.com/details.php?image\\_id=16485&l=russian](http://russian-records.com/details.php?image_id=16485&l=russian).

<sup>354</sup> “Kolbas’ev Sergei Adamovich,” *Vozvrashchennye imena. Knigi pamiati Rossii*. accessed May 31, 2016, <http://visz.nlr.ru/person/show/5851>. As this website indicates, there is some dispute over whether Kolbas’ev was indeed shot in 1937 or died of lymphoma in 1942 in the Gulag.

<sup>355</sup> Starr, *Red and Hot*, 170; NIPTs Memorial f. 1, op. 1, d. 1022, l. 2. (Rehabilitation and memorial files for David Geigner). S. Frederick Starr states that he was arrested on stage, but his records in the *Memorial* archive indicate that it was during a break between sets.

charges in 1937 and shot the following year.<sup>356</sup> Numerous other professional and amateur musicians and fans also fell victim to Stalin's purges.

At first glance it is tempting to say that these figures were targeted for their connections with jazz, but this is to overlook the fact that there were other reasons for the NKVD to suspect these victims. Geigner, though born in Soviet territory, had spent several years in the early 1930s performing in China, particularly Harbin and Shanghai.<sup>357</sup> Most *kharbintsy* who crossed into Soviet territory during the mid 1930s, including the father of future Soviet jazz icon Oleg Lundstrem, were arrested and shot or imprisoned.<sup>358</sup> A similar fate also befell Miron Seletskii.<sup>359</sup> The Athens-born Sof'ianopulo was arrested not because he was a jazz musician, but because of his supposed participation in a "Greek counterrevolutionary nationalist espionage and sabotage organization."<sup>360</sup> The only known arrest of a jazz musician specifically for his or her musical affinities was when Georgii Landsberg was arrested in Rostov-on-Don in 1937 and charged with violating Article 58-10 of the Soviet Criminal Code (spreading anti-Soviet or counterrevolutionary propaganda). However, Landsberg was released after 43 days in jail. He was arrested again in 1938, but this time because he was accused of collaborating with Czech counter-revolutionaries while working as a trade delegate in

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<sup>356</sup> Ol'ga Korzhova, *Dzhaz v Rostove-na-Donu 'ot' i 'po'*, (Rostov-na-Donu: Pegas, 2001), 11.

<sup>357</sup> Inna Klause, *Der Klang des Gulag: Musik und Musiker in den sowjetischen Zwangsarbeitslagern der 1920er- bis 1950er-Jahre*, (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2014), 619.

<sup>358</sup> L.P. Chernikova, "Istoriia v dzhazovoi obrabotke: Chast' 1 – Istoriia sem'i Lundstrem," accessed May 31, 2016, [http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press\\_82.php](http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press_82.php).

<sup>359</sup> NIPTs Memorial, f. 1, op. 1, d. 4233, l. 7. (Rehabilitation and memorial files for Miron Seletskii).

<sup>360</sup> Korzhova, *Dzhaz v Rostove-na-Donu*, 11.

Europe during the early 1920s. He was charged with espionage and shot in November 1938.<sup>361</sup> In all these instances, victims' connections with jazz were peripheral and almost always unrelated to their subsequent arrest, imprisonment, and execution. It was connections with the world beyond Soviet borders that explains why these early pioneers in Soviet jazz became victims of Stalinist terror. As Vladimir Feiertag succinctly concluded, living abroad was equated with engagement in anti-Soviet activities.<sup>362</sup>

All this raises the question of why Leonid Utesov managed to not only survive the Stalin period, but do so with his reputation intact. Utesov had, after all, spent several months abroad in 1927. He was close friends with individuals who fell victim to the Terror such as Isaak Babel, whose foreword to Utesov's 1939 autobiography was removed from the manuscript after his arrest, and Sergei Kolbas'ev. Although Utesov did build relationships with powerful figures like Kliment Voroshilov and Kaganovich, such relationships were no guarantee of safety since even Kaganovich's own brother fell under suspicion of right-wing activism. There is no clear answer as to why Utesov never came under scrutiny, but one likely explanation is that Utesov was so popular with the Soviet masses that he became untouchable. To have arrested Utesov would have destabilized the country.

The fact that jazz was not in itself considered evidence of treason during the Terror raises the question of why practitioners of the genre, along with other musicians and intellectuals, especially Jews, fell under suspicion after the war. Historians point to a

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<sup>361</sup> Vladimir Feiertag, *Dzhaz ot Leningrada do Peterburga: Vremia i sud'by*, (Sankt-Peterburg: Planet Muzyki, 2014), 17. "Leningradskii martirolog tom 11," *Vozvrashchennye imena. Knigi pamiati Rossii*. accessed 31 May 2016, <http://visz.nlr.ru/person/book/t11/13>.

<sup>362</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz ot Leningrada do Peterburga*, 21.

variety of international and domestic factors to explain this shift. Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov argue that anti-westernism and the related anti-cosmopolitanism were rooted in Stalin's fear that Red Army soldiers in Europe were contaminated with western-bourgeois thoughts and ideas after coming into contact with Allied soldiers as well as civilians in Central Europe.<sup>363</sup> When these soldiers returned to the Soviet Union, so the argument went, they brought these nefarious influences with them and threatened the health and stability of the Soviet system. For the good of the country, therefore, these western influences and connections international organizations connected to the West—including the Moscow-based Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee—had to be stamped out.<sup>364</sup> Meanwhile, Elena Zubkova argues that the anti-Western turn was equally inspired by circumstances within Soviet territory. The transition from wartime to peacetime society (demobilization of soldiers, the abolition of ration cards, and postwar economic recovery) yielded few obvious improvements in the everyday living conditions of many Soviet citizens. As some groups challenged the Soviet regime's handling of the transition to peace, Stalin and his associates revived the language of the 1930s and attributed such failings to "enemies" within Soviet society.<sup>365</sup> Thus, western influences were not merely

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<sup>363</sup> Here, "cosmopolitan" refers to those who were suspected of harboring connections with individuals abroad and, therefore, loyalty to any entity other than the Soviet state. Jews were frequently targets of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign.

<sup>364</sup> Konstantin Azadovskii and Boris Egorov, "From Anti-Westernism to Anti-Semitism: Stalin and the Impact of the "Anti-Cosmopolitan" Campaigns on Soviet Culture," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4(1), Winter 2002, 66-67.

<sup>365</sup> Elena Zubkova, "The Soviet Regime and Soviet Society," *Journal of Modern European History* 2(1), 2004, 144-147.

an external threat, but an internal scapegoat and a safety valve for popular discontent that life had not improved for most citizens.

In the cultural sphere, Stalin's anxieties about western and especially American influence manifested in the policies set forth by his culture minister Andrei Zhdanov. The atmosphere that these policies created – known as “Zhdanovism” (*Zhdanovshchina*) – was stridently anti-western and was exemplified in two key Party resolutions. The first, from 1946, condemned the Leningrad-based literary journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* for publishing works by “formalist” writers like poet Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko. The resolution stated that by publishing such literature, the journals exhibited “subservience (*nizkopoklonstvo*) to modern bourgeois western culture.”<sup>366</sup> The second major statement from the Party came in 1948 in the wake of Vano Muradeli's opera *The Great Friendship* (*Velikaia druzhba*), an allegory about the friendship between Russia and the Caucasian republics as depicted in the relationship between a commissar and an Ingush fighter during the Russian Civil War. Stalin and Zhdanov strongly disliked the opera for two main reasons: its ‘inaccurate’ portrayal of the relationship between Russian and non-Russian nationalities and its “formalist” musical style. The Party released another resolution regarding Muradeli's opera, labeling it the latest example of the long-running heresy of musical formalism and stating specifically that it erred in its use of atonality and musical dissonance. As in its 1946 resolution on literature, the Party

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<sup>366</sup> “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) O zhurnalakh ‘Zvezda’ i ‘Leningrad’, 14 avgusta 1946 g.” *Postanovlenie o zhurnalakh “Zvezda” i “Leningrad”*, accessed May 5, 2016. <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/USSR/journal.htm>.

condemned the unhealthy influence of modern western/bourgeois culture.<sup>367</sup> Though the main targets of the resolution were classical composers (notably Muradeli, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Aram Khachaturian), jazz's critics and supporters concluded that jazz was now officially out of favor as well. When the leadership of the Estonian Union of Composers met to discuss the ramifications of the resolution it blamed "our light and entertainment music for their imitation of American jazz."<sup>368</sup>

### **Closing a Public Sphere: Jazz Repressed**

Beginning in 1946, but especially between 1948 and 1950, the Stalinist regime clamped down on jazz within Soviet territory. It did so by first restricting the discourse available to discuss jazz and made it nearly impossible for jazz advocates, whether bureaucrats, musicians, critics, or audiences, to publicly defend it. At the same time, all-union and local agencies at varying levels took measures to discourage the continued performance of jazz music. In a revival of ideology associated with the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians of the 1920s and early 30s, the regime re-conceptualized the relationship between jazz music and areas of Soviet life that jazz directly impacted—leisure, race and ethnicity, and attitudes towards the West and the motherland—in such a way that jazz was now a severe threat to them.

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<sup>367</sup> "Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ob opere 'Velikaia družba' V. Muradeli, 10 fevralia 1948 g.", *Postanovlenie "Ob opere 'Velikaia družba' Muradeli"*, accessed May 6, 2016, <http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/USSR/music.htm>.

<sup>368</sup> Heli Reimann, "Late-Stalinist ideological campaigns and the rupture of jazz: 'jazz-talk' in the Soviet Estonian cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*", *Popular Music*, 33 (3), 2014, 518.

Critics of jazz ramped up their objections to it beginning in 1946. Such criticism was, in many ways, a continuation of the themes that had swirled around jazz during the pre-war period. Multiple columnists bemoaned the low level of musicianship in many smaller jazz orchestras, they labeled jazz music a vulgar form of artistic expression, and some continued to complain that jazz's popularity was stifling appreciation for classical music amongst the masses.<sup>369</sup> Critics also, once again, returned to Maxim Gorky's famous diatribe against jazz from 1928, "Music for Fat People," which they utilized to bludgeon jazz as capitalist, animalistic, and hypersexual. For example, journalist Mattias Sokol'skii, in his 1952 article "On Jazz," relied extensively on Gorky's arguments in his rebuke to a reader who wondered why jazz orchestras could not be utilized in Soviet music.<sup>370</sup>

While old arguments were recycled, new ones emerged alongside them. Jazz's relationship with Soviet leisure culture was flipped on its head. Before the war, jazz advocates argued that the genre's ability to develop cultural sophistication in its performers and audiences as well as its general *joi de vive* made it a useful tool in Soviet relaxation. Now jazz was increasingly depicted as a detriment to cultural development and lacking in intellectual vigor. Though some pre-war critics of jazz made similar claims, journalists in the postwar period repeatedly argued that jazz was "idealess/unprincipled" (*bezydeinyi*) or "pointless" (*bezsmyslennyi*). Boris Khaikin, a Stalin Prize-winning composer and head of the prestigious Kirov Theater in Leningrad,

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<sup>369</sup> For example, see V.B. Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR (po stranitsam pechati, 1945-1964 gg.)*, (Leningrad-Voronezh: Samizdat, 1981), 6-8.

<sup>370</sup> M. Sokol'skii, "O dzhaze," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, February 16, 1952.

told the Party Central Committee that all jazz should be considered unprincipled as well as vulgar.<sup>371</sup>

In her scathing review of Eddie Rosner's performance at the Central Red Army House (a review that deeply hurt the great trumpeter, who had once performed a private concert for Stalin), Elena Grosheva declared that Rosner's group foisted a "complete lack of principles" upon his audience.<sup>372</sup> In his 1950 book, *Music of Spiritual Poverty*, musicologist Viktor Gorodinskii argued that such mindlessness was an innate quality in jazz music. He referenced American jazz composer and bandleader Fred Waring, who, in a 1935 interview for *The American Magazine*, stated that the reason why audiences liked his band so much was because "we give them entertainment, calculated to the average taste of the average listener. We don't try to educate them or uplift them or...make them change their tastes."<sup>373</sup> Gorodinskii juxtaposed this kind of vapid, blasé music with Soviet music, whose task was, first and foremost, to instill higher ideals, morals, and consciousness in those who listened to it. If the goal was for Soviet citizens to acculturate and transform themselves into the New Soviet People, then jazz was detrimental to that effect.

Jazz's critics also re-conceptualized the art form's relationship to race and ethnicity, both in relation to African Americans and Soviet nationalities. For years, jazz's Soviet champions pointed to the genre's African American roots as proof of its

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<sup>371</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 6.

<sup>372</sup> Elena Grosheva, "Poshlost' na estrade," *Izvestiia*, August 18, 1946.

<sup>373</sup> V.M. Gorodinskii, *Muzyka dukhovnoi nishchety* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennyi muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1950), 82. Waring was an extremely popular, white jazz band leader in the US during the early 1930s.



proletarian and folkish sensibilities. Increasingly, however, jazz was depicted as a specifically modern and capitalist music form, irreconcilably divorced from black American culture. In his speech to the Central Committee, Khaikin stated that jazz music had long ago lost its connections to African American culture, having been replaced by “street-performer (*bulvarno-shantannye*) intonations,” implying that jazz had been co-opted by low-cultured, petty bourgeois influences.<sup>374</sup> Mattias Sokol’skii went much further, arguing that jazz’s African American heritage was nothing more than a “shameless lie” propagated by bourgeois musicologists. Not only was jazz not African American, it was a product of white racism!:

If tunes from negro folklore were taken for [use by] a jazz band in a restaurant, these tunes have not only lost all their folk-national specificity, but have been completely perverted, “lynched,” and subjected to the abuse of the American Ku Klux Klansmen of music.

Sokol’skii concluded that anyone who truly cared about the folk culture and the fate of blacks in America could never listen to jazz music.<sup>375</sup>

Attitudes changed not only toward jazz’s African American roots, but also toward its relationship with Soviet nationalities. Increasingly, jazz orchestras were criticized for being non-national. An early indication of this shift can be seen in a 1945 review of Vladimir Sapozhnin’s Estonian Jazz Orchestra. Moscow’s main daily newspaper, *Vecherniaia Moskva*, complained that Sapozhnin’s repertoire, which consisted mainly of

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<sup>374</sup> Boris Khaikin as quoted in Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 6.

<sup>375</sup> Sokol’skii, “O dzhaze”.

“tangos and foxtrots,” was decidedly “uninteresting.” The paper further stated that there was too little “national (*natsional’naia*) music,” with only one Estonian folk piece in the entire concert.<sup>376</sup> Four years later, Aleksandr Anisimov, who at the time headed the music section of the Committee on Arts Affairs, declared that too many artists were held captive by American and Western European influences. Anisimov particularly targeted jazz composers, including head of the All-Union Radio Committee Jazz Orchestra Aleksandr Tsfasman, Viktor Knushevitskii (who, ironically, had composed several jazz rhapsodies based on Soviet folk idioms), Modest Tabachnikov, and Nikolai Minkh, for utilizing “rootless non-national (*vnenatsional’nye*) intonations,” isolated from true Russian music. Only Shul’zhenko and Utesov, Anisimov wrote, were true propagandists for Soviet and Russian national music.<sup>377</sup>

Surprisingly, Anisimov’s reference to “rootless non-nationalism” is one of the few instances in which jazz was explicitly linked with “cosmopolitanism”, the other being Sokol’skii’s much more blunt observation that jazz is “typical cosmopolitan art.”<sup>378</sup> Not to be confused with “cosmopolitanism” discussed in Chapter Three, the post-war campaign against “rootless cosmopolitanism” meant to ferret out internal “enemies” who were thought to foster connections with non-Soviet populations or downplay the importance of Soviet nationalities and their cultures. Jews were disproportionately targeted as just such enemies. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the anti-jazz

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<sup>376</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 4.

<sup>377</sup> A. Anisimov, “Ochistit’ estradu ot chuzhdykh vliianii,” *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, March 19, 1949.

<sup>378</sup> Sokol’skii, “O dzhaze.”

campaign was an expression of anti-cosmopolitanism, though many of the most well-known American jazz figures like Benny Goodman and Irving Berlin were Jewish. Historians generally agree that anti-cosmopolitanism did not ramp up until 1949, but the anti-jazz campaign was well under way by this point. Furthermore, the campaign against jazz lacks the overt anti-Semitism found in the campaign against cosmopolitanism. Anisimov criticizes both Jewish (Tsfasman, Tabachnikov) and non-Jewish (Knushevitskii, Minkh, both ethnic Russians) jazz artists in his article while, conversely, heaping praise upon Leonid Utesov, widely regarded as the father of Soviet jazz and a Jew. The fact that Utesov escaped significant censure or anti-Semitic punishment also suggests that jazz was not a prime target of anti-cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Soviet regime and anti-jazz cultural elites increasingly depicted jazz as a hostile force in the struggle for ethnic and national justice.

The Soviet press also re-conceptualized jazz's relationship with the Soviet motherland during the postwar period. During the Great Patriotic War, jazz music and musicians played an important role in the defense of the motherland and the genre helped Soviet soldiers and civilians articulate what the "homeland" was and why it was worth fighting for. In contrast, postwar critiques of jazz were woven into a larger tapestry of what some scholars call "Soviet Occidentalism," wherein jazz, because of its American-ness, was depicted as an irreconcilable opposite to ideal Soviet culture and a dire threat to the motherland.<sup>379</sup> By the late 1940s, journalists and critics identified jazz as an essential

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<sup>379</sup> See, for example, Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors To The Soviet Union, 1921-1941*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 206.

and ubiquitous component of the capitalist United States' supposed campaign for global dominance.

One clear example of this was a political cartoon that appeared in the pages of *Izvestiia* in 1949. The cartoon was titled “TromBONN”, a portmanteau of “trombone” and the West German capital of Bonn, and it depicts an American army officer whose cap sports a dollar sign instead of the US Army insignia. The officer is playing a trombone whose bell is a German replete with Tyrolean hat. The German, who has another dollar sign on his cheek, is open mouthed with swastikas pouring out. The caption underneath the cartoon reads “He was taken in by American jazz, and now they [the Americans] play there.”<sup>380</sup> The cartoon argues that, having been seduced by jazz, West Germany is now playing the United States' neo-fascist tune. A few years later, *Izvestiia* published musicologist and journalist Izrail' Nest'ev's article “Dollar-ish cacophony” (*Dollarovaia kakafoniia*). In the article, Nest'ev argued that the stain of capitalism tainted all music coming out of the United States. No music was immune, not even classical music. Nest'ev lamented that when the New York Philharmonic performed Beethoven's Fifth Symphony on the radio, the announcer used the intervals between movements to advertise the latest Ford automobile. Jazz music was doubly guilty because it was firstly a “prostitution” of African American folk music and secondly because when it went abroad, it slowly crushed local musical cultures it encountered. In France, Nest'ev said, locals protested the fact that jazz had effectively killed off French folk songs.<sup>381</sup> Jazz was

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<sup>380</sup> Boris Efremov and S. Mikhailov, “TromBONN”, *Izvestiia*, 3 noiabria 1949 g. The Russian text is “*On vziat v amerikanskii dzhaz,/Na nem igraut tam seichas.*”

<sup>381</sup> I. Nest'ev, “Dollarovaia kakafoniia,” *Izvestiia*, January 7, 1951.

just another weapon in America's quest for global empire. It is no surprise, in this context, why slogans such as "Today you play jazz, but tomorrow you sell out the Motherland" (*Segodnia ty igraesh' dzhaz, a zavtra rodinu prodash'!*), and "It is only one step from the saxophone to the knife!" (*Ot saksofona do nozha – odin shag!*) abounded in this period.<sup>382</sup>

At heart, the change in jazz discourse centered around a different understanding of the relationship between form and content. For over a decade, jazz's supporters had interpreted socialist philosophy and Soviet cultural policy in such a way as to argue that despite jazz's associations with western bourgeois culture, it was not merely acceptable, but an essential component of Soviet society. Now, cultural elites argued that this was not the case. Jazz as an art form was no longer considered a neutral vessel that could be filled with whatever content and meaning that the artist intended. To perform jazz of any kind, so the postwar musical and political establishment argued, was to surreptitiously express content that was incompatible with Soviet ideology, content that was inherently capitalist, uncultured, and aggressively imperialist. This fusion of form and content in jazz, which intensified in the Soviet press and in jazz's rapid disappearance in live and recorded mediums, signaled an end to the public sphere in which jazz was utilized to articulate differing ideas about the nature of Soviet society. There was only one way to interpret the relationship between jazz and society: the state's way.

The clearest articulation of this content-form transformation came in Sokol'skii's 1952 article "On Jazz." Responding to a letter from a reader asking why jazz could not be

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<sup>382</sup> S.A. Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi, ili ocherki istorii dzhaza v Novosibirsk: 1928-2005 gg.*, (Novosibirsk: Sibirskoe universitetskoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 57-58.

used in Soviet music, Sokol'skii argued that jazz music was inseparable from the degenerative, "big business" culture of the West. "Why comrade," Sokol'skii asked, "do you suggest that we dress up our clear, beautiful, realistic music in the overseas jazz rags [which are] completely alien to its spirit, its nature, not at all on course with its content nor its style?" He went on to proclaim that he strongly objected to the "artificial connection" of Soviet music and the jazz orchestra, declaring that to do so would only distort this music.<sup>383</sup> "How is it possible," he asked, "to develop jazz music, giving a positive and even Soviet content?" His answer was that jazz rejected everything that was good in music, not just classical music, but all music. Sokol'skii urged the reader to explore the world of symphonic music and stated that after doing so, he would finally understand why jazz was so antithetical to "genuine" art.<sup>384</sup> The message was clear: jazz and Soviet values were irreconcilable.

The effects of these attacks on Soviet jazz were, while not uniform, decidedly negative. With jazz no longer considered a legitimate component of Soviet leisure, some local agencies went about eradicating it from the leisure venues with which jazz was historically associated: cinemas, eateries, parks, and dance halls. In 1948, Mosrepertkom, the Moscow censorship committee, drafted a plan of action to rid Moscow's small venues of jazz. The committee argued that groups like Eddie Rosner's had previously been able to "smuggle" western dancing songs into their repertoires thanks to years of bureaucratic overlap, protection from venue directors, and because groups formed and disbanded so

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<sup>383</sup> Sokol'skii, "O dzhaze."

<sup>384</sup> Sokol'skii, "O dzhaze."

quickly.<sup>385</sup> Mosrepertkom sought to prevent the further infiltration of jazz through a number of measures, such as quashing all remaining jazz orchestras still working under the Moscow Light Entertainment Organization or the Ministry of Film, who booked groups to perform in cinemas, and replacing them with 9-person salon orchestras (*deviatki*). These salon orchestras would perform a mix of Russian classical works, Soviet compositions and the “best” of western light music such as the works of nineteenth-century composers Emile Waldteufel, Bela Keler, and Franz von Suppe, rather than the “talentless and vulgar dance tunes built on dissonance and puzzling syncopation.”<sup>386</sup> The committee boasted that by year’s end, they had successfully removed jazz orchestras and “western foxtrots” from Moscow’s restaurants, cafes, cinemas, and dance halls, replacing them with Soviet marches, songs from Soviet films, and Western ballroom dances. Mosrepertkom stated that, having done its job, it was now up to Soviet composers to expand the repertoires for these salon orchestras.<sup>387</sup>

It was not only venues, but also leisure technologies that reduced their reliance upon jazz and “western dancing music.” The Soviet recording industry stopped pressing records of Soviet jazz artists between 1948 and 1953. Even bandleaders who stopped performing jazz, like Viktor Knushevitskii, Nikolai Minkh, and most famously, Leonid Utesov, produced far fewer recordings during this period than they had previously. The

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<sup>385</sup> TsAGM f. 2007, op. 1, d. 110, l. 10. (Report on the work of Mosrepertkom for 1948)

<sup>386</sup> TsAGM f. 2007, op. 1, d. 110, l. 10-12.

<sup>387</sup> TsAGM, f. 2007, op. 1, d. 110, l. 18-19.

three of them combined to release fewer than a dozen new songs between 1949 and 1954.<sup>388</sup>

In some cases, talismanic bandleaders were removed. The best example of this is Aleksandr Tsfasman, one of the most esteemed jazz composers and bandleaders in the country. In the summer of 1945, Tsfasman performed a rendition of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (which was prefaced by both the American and Soviet national anthems) at the Moscow Conservatory to great popular and critical acclaim, yet by the end of 1946, Tsfasman left the orchestra.<sup>389</sup> Tsfasman's biographer argues that this was because of a combination of both major changes in official attitudes towards jazz, something Tsfasman's orchestra was particularly susceptible to as a state-sponsored ensemble, and the bandleader's own bullheadedness in the face of the Radio Committee's demands.<sup>390</sup> It suffices to say that it is unclear the extent to which Tsfasman was fired and the extent to which he quit out of protest. Nevertheless, had Tsfasman been allowed to continue performing jazz numbers with his orchestra, he would likely have remained in his position. After leaving the orchestra, Tsfasman dropped out of the Soviet jazz scene entirely, choosing to focus on his flower garden instead. When he came to a meeting of the Composers' Union a few years later, he brought a bouquet of flowers with him, bitterly remarking that this was his job and music was "merely a hobby."<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> *Russian-records.com*. This is based upon a search for *estradnye orkestry* for the years 1948-1954.

<sup>389</sup> On the Gershwin performance, see A.N. Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman: Korifei sovetskogo dzhaza*, (Moskva: Muzyka, 2006), 61-62.

<sup>390</sup> Golubev, *Aleksandr Tsfasman*, 65-66.

<sup>391</sup> Starr, *Red and Hot*, 215.



In other cases, entire jazz ensembles were dismantled. In September 1946, for example, the Committee on Arts Affairs, in conjunction with the Central Committee Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) department and a panel of composers (including, ironically, the same Muradeli who would be attacked in 1948) decided to forcibly disband Boris Renskii's jazz orchestra. Their rationale was that Renskii's group "imitates western neurasthenic music" and exposed Soviet audiences to it. Despite the protestations of the orchestra's musicians, they were transferred to the cinema sector and farmed out to various theaters.<sup>392</sup> Similar fates befell some of the most popular orchestras of the prewar and wartime era, including those of Iakov Skomorovskii, Andrei Semenov, and Eddie Rosner.<sup>393</sup> By May 1948, the only nationally renowned jazz orchestras still in existence were Nikolai Minkh's Leningrad Radio Orchestra, the now-leaderless All-Union Radio Orchestra, and Leonid Utesov's group.<sup>394</sup>

To survive the onslaught from what Utesov called the "guardians of morality," jazz musicians and ensembles had to reform or rebrand themselves.<sup>395</sup> Some musicians, particularly saxophonists, abandoned their instruments entirely, choosing to switch to other reed instruments like bassoon or clarinet.<sup>396</sup> Other musicians "hid" in salon

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<sup>392</sup> "Luzhebnaia zapiska agitpropa TsK po voprosu rasformirovaniia dzhaz-orkestra pod upravleniem B.B. Renskogo, 12 noiabria 1946 g." in *Stalin i kosmopolitizm: Dokumenty agitpropa TsK KPSS, 1945-1953*, sost. D.G. Nadzhafov, Z.S. Belousova, (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiia', 2005), 96-97. Renskii created a new orchestra, but it focused strictly on folk music.

<sup>393</sup> Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi*, 61.

<sup>394</sup> GARF f. 6903, op. 1, d. 242, l. 12. (Meeting of the Artistic-Musical Council of the All-Union Radio Committee, May 12, 1948)

<sup>395</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo, serdtse!*, 271.

<sup>396</sup> See, for example, Viktor Dering in Kirill Iakimets, "Shankhai."

orchestras or musical ensembles that were attached to established theaters. Members of Oleg Lundstrem's jazz orchestra in Kazan', for example, spent the years 1948-1953 performing for the city's operas, philharmonics, and cinema orchestras.<sup>397</sup>

For those who wished to keep their ensembles intact, the favored tactic was to drop the term "jazz" from the orchestra's name and replace it with "estrada" (light entertainment). This was not merely a cosmetic consideration, as it involved a wholesale shift in repertoire and the abandonment of "foxtrots" and western songs in favor of Soviet and folk songs. Artem Aivazian's Armenian State Jazz Orchestra, for example, was pressured by the Committee of Arts Affairs and the musical establishment to drop jazz songs from their repertoire in favor of Armenian folk songs and songs by Russian composers, much to Aivazian's chagrin.<sup>398</sup> In December 1948, the Armenian newspaper *Communist* praised Aivazian's re-minted Armenian Estrada Orchestra for its renditions of several Armenian songs as well as its performance of "Song about Russia."<sup>399</sup>

The most successful jazz artist to navigate the "estrada" route was the great impresario himself, Leonid Utesov. His group became an estrada orchestra in 1948 and maintained a high level of popularity and good press throughout the anti-jazz period, though as noted above, they recorded very little. One set list from the "estrada" period of Utesov's orchestra illustrates the dramatic shift. Of the dozen songs that Utesov's

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<sup>397</sup> Ol'ga Kruchina, "Nash sosed Oleg Lundstrem," accessed April 30, 2014. [http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press\\_32.php](http://www.lundstrem-jazz.ru/press/press_32.php).

<sup>398</sup> RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 1903. (Committee on Arts Affairs meeting regarding the Armenian Jazz orchestra, June 9, 1948).

<sup>399</sup> Feiertag, *Dzhaz v SSSR*, 11.

orchestra was set to perform, hardly any of them had appeared in the group's repertoire prior to 1948.<sup>400</sup> It is unclear if Utesov's continued success derived from his willingness to "sell out" and conform to political standards or from Soviet authorities' unwillingness to attack such a popular celebrity. It was probably a mixture of both. Nevertheless, Utesov wrote later in his life that the anti-jazz period was a stressful experience for him as he was constantly at risk of condemnation for having too jazzy of a repertoire.<sup>401</sup> At the time, however, Utesov vocally denounced jazz in the press. In 1952, he wrote that jazz was not a style of orchestra (the exact opposite of what he had argued before the Leningrad Composers' Union in 1937), but a form of music with a specific content. Soviet light orchestras, he wrote, had nothing in common with jazz and were in fact "diametrically opposed" to jazz.<sup>402</sup>

By the eve of Stalin's death, jazz's presence in and impact upon Soviet society had been much reduced. Only anti-jazz essays appeared in the press and it became harder for audiences to engage with jazz either on stage or via technologies of mass communication. This was partly because these venues were subject to stricter control, but also because the number of jazz ensembles had been greatly reduced due to scrutiny of musicians, disbandment of orchestras, or because bands, seeing the writing on the wall, reconstituted themselves as orchestras of the light entertainment variety. Between 1946

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<sup>400</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 834, ll. 41, 75. (List of concert programs and songs of Utesov's jazz orchestra)

<sup>401</sup> Utesov, *Spasibo sertdse!*, 272-273.

<sup>402</sup> Leonid Utesov, "Bol'she muzyki – veseloi i raznobraznoi," *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, April 9, 1952. In Utesov's defence, he did at least argue that saxophones did not pose a threat to Soviet music and should be allowed in orchestras.

and 1953, much that Soviet jazz advocates had worked to build over the previous fifteen years had been torn asunder.

### **Jazz as Counterpublic Sphere and Proto-*vnye***

Although party-state rhetoric turned against jazz over the postwar period and although jazz bands, especially nationally known ones, were barred from performing unless they adhered to newer, stricter guidelines, this did not mean that Soviet audiences, musicians, or even some Soviet officials completely abandoned jazz as a viable art form. While in the past pro-jazz sentiments could be expressed either through discussions in the press, turning on the radio, or going to concerts – all forms of public engagement – the clampdown on jazz and its removal from the radio, concert halls, and cinemas, drove enthusiasts to engage with it in other ways, some public and some underground. This duality gave way to a counterpublic and proto-*vnye* jazz scene between 1948 and Stalin’s death in 1953. As explained above, the Soviet jazz scene in this period was a counterpublic because it offered an alternative understanding of Soviet identity and values to that handed down by Stalin and his associates, but it was also in many ways *vnye*: “suspended” both within the parameters of the Soviet regime and outside of them. However, while Stalin lived, a single authoritative voice existed to interpret Soviet ideology and so the *vnye* space outlined by Yurchak had not fully formed yet—hence jazz under Late Stalinism as a proto-*vnye*.

There are several ways in which affinity for jazz persisted alongside official condemnation. One of the ways jazz culture continued was through the very same mass media that had propagated the genre during the 1930s: phonograph and the radio. While

the Soviet recording industry stopped pressing new jazz songs, there were still millions of records that had been printed in the previous two decades circulating around the country. One of Utesov's fans wrote to him from Alma-Ata in 1949 and boasted of the extensive collection of Utesov's records he had cobbled together. He proudly told Utesov that, after much searching, he had finally managed to find copies of "Gop so smykom" and "From an Odessan Prison", two of Utesov's early "criminal" recordings that had been removed from his repertoire over a decade before.<sup>403</sup>

It was not simply old Soviet records that circulated either. As many anti-jazz crusaders suspected, Red Army soldiers, returning to the Soviet Union from abroad, brought back the latest Western recordings. For the most part, Red Army soldiers in Central and Eastern Europe were given carte blanche to send home parcels filled with whatever they managed to find or steal. Only print materials were strictly forbidden in these parcels.<sup>404</sup> Red Army soldiers, therefore, were a valuable source for foreign jazz recordings after the war. Vladimir Savinov recalled that the small Siberian town of Berdsk had a military airfield where soldiers returning from Eastern Europe would stop over. They would bring with them jazz records they had acquired and townspeople would gather with them to listen together. Savinov, who would later become a jazz trombonist and pianist himself, remembered such gatherings as his earliest exposure to jazz. Such "trophy disks" also came from Japan and especially China where the Columbia and RCA

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<sup>403</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 757, l. 66. (Fan mail to L.O. Utesov, May-December 1949).

<sup>404</sup> Brandon Schechter, *Government Issue: The Material Culture of the Red Army, 1941-1945* (unpublished manuscript), 292-300.

Victor record labels had long established markets.<sup>405</sup> These foreign records were further disseminated by black market entrepreneurs who copied the original records onto used x-ray films and then sold them through an elaborate network of distributors. Such illegal trading networks could be found not only in major cities like Leningrad, but also in regional centers like Saratov.<sup>406</sup>

Besides the wide legal and illegal circulation of jazz records, citizens could, if they were lucky, hear the latest foreign records via international shortwave radio. According to recent estimates, by the late 1940s, about one quarter to one third of all radio sets in the Soviet Union were capable of tuning in to multiple frequencies (the rest were the single-frequency reproducers mentioned in Chapter One).<sup>407</sup> The most influential of these stations were the BBC and the Voice of America (VOA). In its efforts to counteract Soviet propaganda both internationally and within the communist bloc, VOA began to broadcast a variety of cultural programs in 1947, including jazz, over shortwave frequencies. Although jazz music was not a central component of VOA broadcasting until the mid-50s, it was regularly transmitted from the late 40s via “Jazz Club USA”, the radio program hosted by British-born jazz musician and journalist Leonard Feather.<sup>408</sup> In 1948, one Soviet writer noted that “the Voice of American [sends]

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<sup>405</sup> Belichenko, *Sinkopy na Obi*, 60. Tsipursky also discusses the circulation of Soviet and foreign jazz records in Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth,” 349.

<sup>406</sup> Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth,” 350.

<sup>407</sup> Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945-1953” *Jarbüche für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50, 2002, 51.

<sup>408</sup> Starr, 210.

us examples of American music, obviously in the full conviction that such musical additions...will attract a large number of listeners....”<sup>409</sup> Another complained in the pages of the music journal *Sovetskaia muzyka* that “each evening propagandists from the Voice of America send us examples of American music.”<sup>410</sup> Despite several attempts to limit the impact of stations like the VOA, including jamming and making Soviet receivers less powerful, listeners still managed to tune in. By the VOA’s own estimates, eight million Soviet citizens regularly tuned in to its broadcasts (though only five million shortwave sets existed in the Soviet Union).<sup>411</sup>

Jazz fans also continued to engage with the genre through the social activity of dancing. While organizations like Mosrepertkom boasted that they had clamped down on jazz venues after 1948, the Komsomol expressed continued frustration that Soviet youth were still dancing to jazz as late as 1952. Dance halls in major parks of culture and rest still hired dance instructors (“dance speculators,” as the Komsomol labelled them) who advertised themselves as ballroom dance instructors, but really taught jazz dancing. Some club and dance hall managers in Moscow and elsewhere also organized jazz dances at their venues though they risked censure. They did so because Soviet youths were willing to pay the steep cost of tickets to these dances and the pressure on managers to fulfill or

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<sup>409</sup> Starr, 210.

<sup>410</sup> *Sovetskaia muzyka* as quoted in Edele, “Strange Young Men,” 52.

<sup>411</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin*, 210. Aleksei Yurchak argues that the Soviet authorities only jammed Russian-language broadcasts, but the VOA in English went untouched. See Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 178.

overfulfill their financial plans was more important than avoiding a scolding from state cultural organizations or the press.<sup>412</sup>

The most conspicuous subgroup to emerge within the Soviet jazz counterpublic were the *stiliagi*. Though the *stiliagi* are more often associated with culture during the early Thaw, they are, as one historian summarizes, “a product of late Stalinism.”<sup>413</sup> The *stiliagi* were predominantly upper- and middle-class youths, many of whose parents were high-ranking party or state functionaries, who openly flaunted their admiration for the West. Overwhelmingly male, these youths challenged norms through a combination of ostentatious clothing and apolitical attitudes. Though, like the politically active groups described above, the *stiliagi* represented only a small portion of the Soviet population, they were conspicuous enough to warrant lampooning in the satirical magazine *Krokodil*. In their obsession with western culture, the *stiliagi* were particularly fond of jazz music and pre-war jazz dances like the foxtrot, rumba, and tango as well as new dances like the “Canadian” and the “triple Hamburg.”<sup>414</sup> While the *stiliagi* appear to constitute a counterpublic because they flouted social norms and openly embraced western and especially American culture at the peak of fears over Americanization and “rootless cosmopolitanism,” they cannot be considered on their own a counterpublic. They were protected by the social status of their families and therefore were not a subordinate group.

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<sup>412</sup> Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth,” 342-345.

<sup>413</sup> Edele, “Strange Young Men,” 37.

<sup>414</sup> Edele, “Strange Young Men,” 41.



At any rate, the movement on its own was quite small and did not overtly challenge Stalin's authority.

Another youth subculture, far less ostentatious and more widespread than the *stiliagi* were the “jazz enthusiasts” (*dzhazovye liudi*).<sup>415</sup> The “jazz enthusiasts” were, like the *stiliagi* usually young men from middle class backgrounds, but whereas the *stiliagi* were primarily interested in contrarianism and Western culture, jazz enthusiasts considered themselves jazz fans first and foremost. One jazz enthusiast, the Moscow-born Armenian Georgii Garanian, who eventually became one of the most highly respected jazz musicians of the late- and post-Soviet periods, expressed the disinterest in ideology that was typical of *vnye* when he stated that “we were so into jazz that we had no other interests, it was jazz and nothing else.”<sup>416</sup>

It was not only jazz consumers who defied the regime, but also producers. Throughout the anti-jazz campaign, Leonid Utesov continued to receive letters from amateur jazz musicians, many of whom were “jazz enthusiasts,” who were themselves starting up new ensembles. A group of sailors in Crimea, for example, formed a jazz band, but confessed that they lacked sheet music or anyone who could play the saxophone they managed to acquire. They, therefore, asked the jazz star to send them songs and literature on how to play the saxophone.<sup>417</sup> Another fan, writing from the small city of Stryi in western Ukraine in 1949, boasted that the city had a great restaurant-based

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<sup>415</sup> Though this term literally translates as “jazz people”, Tsipursky chooses to use the term “enthusiast” instead. Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youths,” 347.

<sup>416</sup> Georgii Garanian as quoted in Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youths,” 347.

<sup>417</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 755, l. 4. (Fan mail to L.O. Utesov, June-December 1948)

jazz combo that played every night from 9 PM until 1 AM and Sunday afternoons, as if the crackdown on jazz had never occurred.<sup>418</sup> In some instances, these groups managed to skirt the authorities by submitting repertoires full of approved songs to the censors, only to play completely jazz songs during performances. In other instances, musicians could benefit from the lack of knowledge that censors had about their music. One Saratov-based jazz enthusiast and musician remarked that he could have easily claimed to have written Duke Ellington's classic song, "Take the 'A' Train" and gotten away with it.<sup>419</sup> Significantly, these examples occur far from the epicenters of Soviet power. In the metropolises of Moscow and Leningrad, where the reach of the authorities was much stronger, it was more difficult to engage with jazz in public. To be sure, those who did engage with jazz in these peripheral places still ran the risk of punishment, including jail time or expulsion from institutes of higher education.

In some cases, bandleaders chose to simply ignore demands that they stop playing or were protected by benevolent local administrators. Sigismund Spizhevskii, a saxophonist in Rostov-on-Don, recalled an incident from when his orchestra performed at the local House of Flying Officers: an inspector from Moscow came and, when he saw the saxophones, he became irate, wondering how they could play such awful instruments. After he left, the saxophonists began to discuss among themselves whether they should switch to clarinet or stop playing altogether. The director of the House of Flying Officers came in and told them, "[You] listened to the discussion and [will] forget it. He left, the

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<sup>418</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 757, l. 14. This restaurant's activities may also be explained by the financial motivations outlined above.

<sup>419</sup> Tsipursky, "Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth," 354-356.

door closed behind him, and everything will be as it was.” Spizhevskii said that he worked for a further year and a half in the orchestra without incident.<sup>420</sup>

Such sentiment could be found across Soviet territory. If Utesov’s fan mail from the late 1940s is any indication, popular affection for jazz did not diminish terribly amidst the official campaigns against it. For one thing, although Utesov changed the title of his orchestra to an “estrada” orchestra, few fans referred to it as such. Most continued to profess their admiration for him and his “jazz” orchestra. One fan in Sverdlovsk wrote in March 1948 that his interest in Utesov’s “jazz” band grew constantly.<sup>421</sup>

Later that year, another fan in Voroshilovgrad wrote to say that “jazz art in general and your mastery in particular, consumes my mind (*poglatilo’ s golovoi*)” and that, though he had seen several other jazz orchestras throughout the years, none compared to Utesov’s.<sup>422</sup> This residual love for jazz and Utesov may be partially explained by the nature of his fandom. As I argued in Chapter Two, many listeners developed what they perceived to be deep, personal relationships with Utesov. These relationships, forged during the 1930s or during the dark days of the war, proved difficult to break. For example, a factory worker in Odessa, who declared himself a “fanatic” for music, wrote to Utesov in September 1948 to express his “unending love” for the jazz artist. The worker stated that he first fell in love with Utesov through his early hits, like “Sadko” and “From an Odessan Prison.” Judging from the number of fan letters that

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<sup>420</sup> Korzhova, *Dzhaz v Rostov-na-donu*, 27.

<sup>421</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 754, l. 51. (Fan mail to L.O. Utesov, January-May 1948)

<sup>422</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 755, l. 35.

Utesov received for the music to his wartime repertoire, his presence on the front and in film during the war further solidified his relationship with audiences.<sup>423</sup>

Just because musicians and audiences continued to engage with jazz, it does not mean that they considered themselves opposed to Soviet ideology. Many of them were able to maintain, or at least exhibit, both a love of jazz and a deference to Soviet power. Indeed, for those who had been listening to jazz since the early 1930s, this was practically second nature. Many people were able to separate their interest in jazz from any kind of fascination with the West or western ideology. Several of the “jazz enthusiasts” recalled that they liked jazz because of its aesthetic qualities and not because they wanted to stand in opposition to the regime. Although some jazz enthusiasts were won over by the anti-Soviet propaganda they heard while listening to jazz on VOA broadcasts, it appears that they were the exception rather than the norm.<sup>424</sup> In fact, a number of the “jazz enthusiasts” became professional jazz musicians and happily entered mainstream popular culture after the genre’s rehabilitation, indicating that they did not consider jazz to be inherently anti-Soviet. In this sense, then, while Soviet jazz fans did not present a political counter-discourse during the late Stalin years, they nonetheless believed in a more open interpretation of Soviet culture, one that included jazz along with other more accepted cultural forms in Soviet life.

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<sup>423</sup> See, for example, RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 755, l. 31.

<sup>424</sup> Tsipursky, “Jazz, Power, and Soviet Youth,” 352-353, 358.

## Jazz in the Gulag

The most paradoxical example of jazz's persistence amidst persecution can be found in the Gulag. The Gulag is the quintessential *vnnye* space. It was a physical space, but was invisible on most maps during the Soviet period. It was the fullest expression of state power within Soviet territory (thus very much "inside" the system), but its victims, gulag prisoners, were physically, civically, and metaphorically removed from the Soviet body politic (thus very much "outside" the system). It was in this space, "suspended" inside and outside the Soviet regime, that jazz persisted most freely. As jazz was being rooted out as an unhealthy and dangerous aspect of Stalinist society, it grew in the very institution that was, ostensibly, meant to rehabilitate and restore deviant citizens of that society.

There are political and pragmatic explanations for why jazz flourished in the Gulag. From a political perspective, prisoners were actively encouraged to engage in cultural activities like theatrical or musical performances, the theory being that through these activities they would gradually become more culturally enlightened, which would ultimately contribute to their rehabilitation. Indeed, most camps had "cultural-educational sections" (*kul'turno vospitatel'naia chast'*) that organized concerts for fellow inmates and officers as well as tours to nearby camps.<sup>425</sup> Although jazz was never officially identified as an integral component of these "cultural-educational" campaigns, jazz orchestras formed under their aegis. Gulag jazz troupes were given official titles such as "Dal'stroi MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) Central Agit-brigade," implying that their

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<sup>425</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 757, l. 76. (Fan letters to L.O. Utesov, May-December, 1949).

*raison d'être* was to spread agitational propaganda within the camps.<sup>426</sup> Nataliia Karpova, for example, who directed the cultural section for the camp in Noril'sk, wrote a character reference for Vitalii Babichev, who directed the camp's jazz orchestra. In this letter, she stated that Babichev's "agit-collective orchestra" did great work in educating its members and performing for fellow prisoners.<sup>427</sup> Cultural engagement, including engagement with jazz in this instance, helped to remake gulag inmates into better citizens of the Soviet system. Some camp commanders, employing the same logic that dictated Soviet leisure policy during the 1930s, also believed that giving inmates opportunities for entertainment would also make them more effective workers.<sup>428</sup>

The other, more practical explanation for why jazz could be heard in the Gulag, is that camp commanders wanted it. Many commanders considered it a point of pride to have a theater troupe, orchestra, or other cultural institution in their camp. It was also one of the few ways that camp commanders, relegated to the remotest parts of Soviet territory, could replicate the comforts of urban life. As one former prisoner recalled, his camp commander could walk to the camp theater "as if to a café. He could listen to his favorite arias, then go and have some champagne..."<sup>429</sup> Jazz orchestras were, therefore, a way for commanders to escape the drudgery of life on the Soviet periphery.

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<sup>426</sup> Georgii Fel'dgun, *Zapiski lagernogo muzykanta*, (Novosibirsk, 1998), 93.

<sup>427</sup> NIPs Memorial f. 1, op. 1, d. 242, l. 7. (Rehabilitation records for Vitalii Babichev)

<sup>428</sup> See, for example, Dmitri Dragilev, *Eddie Rozner: Shmaliaem dzhaz, cholera iasna!: Dokumental'nyi roman*, (Nizhnyi Novgorod: Dekom, 2011), 111.

<sup>429</sup> Tomash Kizny, *GULAG* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2007), 242.

The musical ensembles that formed in the Gulag, including jazz orchestras, were often a motley mix of seasoned professionals and rank amateurs. Georgii Fel'dgun, an Estonian Red Army translator before his arrest in 1942, recalled his colleagues in the Gulag jazz orchestra near Sovetskii Gavan', a small port in the Far East near Khabarovsk. Among them were several former professional musicians of Estonian origin including accordionist Artur Tormi (who had somehow managed to acquire a Hohner Tango-5 accordion in prison) and saxophonist Reingol'd Kuuzik. The leader of their orchestra was violinist Edval'd Turgan, who, before his arrest, taught at the conservatories of Tallinn and Paris.<sup>430</sup> A similar situation emerged in Vorkuta's gulag jazz orchestra. Of the 20 musicians involved in the jazz ensemble, 12 had been professional musicians before their imprisonment.<sup>431</sup> While many former professionals were involved in gulag jazz, there were some musicians with no musical training at all. Mordechai Braun, a Jew who met jazz trumpeter and bandleader Eddie Rosner while imprisoned in Khabarovsk, credits the bandleader with saving his life because he recruited Braun to play trumpet in his orchestra even though the one-armed Braun could not read music and had never played trumpet before in his life.<sup>432</sup> Likewise, Valerii Babichev was the only trained musician in his jazz orchestra in Noril'sk and he was responsible for teaching many of his bandmates how to play and read music.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Fel'dgun, *Zapiski*, 93.

<sup>431</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 755, l. 73.

<sup>432</sup> Mordechai Braun, *Dzhazmen iz GULAGa*, directed by Pierre-Henry Salfati (1999; Paris, Ideale Audience, 1999), Video. Rosner was arrested in 1946 when, sensing the change in attitudes towards jazz, attempted to flee to Poland. He was arrested in L'vov, charged with espionage, and sent to the gulag.

<sup>433</sup> NIPTs Memorial f. 1, op. 1, d. 242, ll. 4-6.

Skilled musicians or not, many Gulag inmates sought to join cultural institutions of all kinds. For some who had been professionals before their imprisonment, it was an outlet for pent up desires to express themselves creatively. More importantly, participation in these ensembles meant an escape from hard labor details, though it did not mean an escape from non-artistic work entirely. Even Rosner, aside from directing his camp jazz orchestra, worked in the kitchens, in the camp barbershop, and even as an obstetrician!<sup>434</sup>

Gulag jazz repertoires were sometimes, ironically, more free than those of the increasingly sparse jazz and “estrada” orchestras on the outside. They sometimes mirrored pre-war jazz ensembles in their mix of western jazz songs and Soviet symphonic and folk compositions. Fel’dgun recalled that his orchestra performed parts of Isaak Dunaevskii’s score from *Circus*, Viktor Knushevitskii’s jazz arrangement of the folk song “Little Apples,” and several of the Glen Miller hits featured in *Sun Valley Serenade*. The extent to which gulag jazz orchestras could incorporate such broad repertoires often depended on the good will of camp commanders. Fel’dgun fondly remembered the chief of the political department at Bukhty Vanina, an Old Bolshevik who was “decent and intelligent enough to understand and love art” regardless of who created it. This officer acquired scores and recordings of jazz songs from sailors returning from the US and Canada and gave them to Fel’dgun’s orchestra.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Dragilev, *Eddie Rozner*, 113.

<sup>435</sup> Fel’dgun, *Zapiski*, 96-97.



Other camp officers, while not necessarily anti-jazz, were less inclined toward “inappropriate,” western jazz. Lazar Shereshevskii, who performed in Zinovii Binkin’s gulag jazz orchestra in Vorkuta, recalled that they initially performed a mix of American and Soviet standards until their commander forbade American songs.<sup>436</sup> Another gulag jazz ensemble in Vorkuta wrote to Utesov to ask that he send them music for some new songs since their camp commander had “categorically forbidden” songs from the West.<sup>437</sup> Other orchestras got around such restrictions in more surreptitious ways. Binkin, for example, wrote his own compositions in the style of American jazz while Eddie Rosner interpreted Soviet songs like “Let’s Have a Smoke” in a heavily syncopated manner.<sup>438</sup>

Gulag jazz orchestras were a prime form of entertainment in the regions where they were located and they performed both inside and outside the “zone,” as the prison grounds were called. Some camps boasted their own theaters that could host concerts, but bands often performed in whatever space was available, such as in the camp cafeteria.<sup>439</sup> In many cases, Gulag jazz orchestras were a prime source of entertainment for the general public as well. Fel’dgun’s jazz band performed in several theaters outside the camps, including the local House of Naval Officers, dramatic theaters, and various Palaces of Culture.<sup>440</sup> Likewise, Rosner performed at the local Ministry of Internal

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<sup>436</sup> Kizny, *GULAG*, 255.

<sup>437</sup> RGALI f. 3005, op. 1, d. 755, l. 74.

<sup>438</sup> For Binkin, see Kizny, *GULAG*, 255; for Rosner, see *Dzhazmen iz GULAGa (film)*.

<sup>439</sup> *Dzhazmen iz GULAGa (film)*.

<sup>440</sup> Fel’dgun, *Zapiski*, 95.

Affairs club in Sovetskii Gavan' as well as the Dzerzhinskii Pioneer Camp nearby.<sup>441</sup> In some cases, civilian and Gulag performers collaborated side-by-side with one another. Antonina Gracheva, who was the camp accountant in Khabarovsk, joined Eddie Rosner's orchestra as a singer and soon became his lover and the mother of his son Vladimir.<sup>442</sup> He also collaborated with members of the local military song and dance ensemble.<sup>443</sup> Thus, as if to further accentuate its *vnye* status, the Gulag was porous and allowed jazz to circulate between the prison world and the civilian world.

Despite aggressive attempts to stamp out jazz in Soviet territory, the genre persisted. It persisted largely thanks to the counterpublic of individuals who saw jazz as perfectly compatible with Soviet ideology, even if they could not express so in traditional avenues like the press, conferences, recordings, or tours, and who believed in a more open interpretation of Soviet culture and identity. Jazz also persisted thanks to an early and not-quite-formed version of *vnye* in which figures such as theater directors and gulag camp commanders, among others, dismissed or ignored official anti-jazz ideology because of their affinity for the genre.

## **Conclusion**

Between 1946 and 1953, party-state authorities and Soviet cultural elites eliminated jazz from the realm of acceptable Soviet art and entertainment forms.

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<sup>441</sup> Dragilev, *Eddie Rozner*, 111.

<sup>442</sup> Dragilev, *Eddie Rozner*, 111-112.

<sup>443</sup> *Dzhazmen iz GULAGa* (film).

Allegedly motivated by fears of international threats and the need to scapegoat failings in postwar Soviet society, the regime initiated a discursive turn against jazz, arguing that it was permanently and inherently rooted in the anathemas of American imperialism and crass commercial capitalism.

This radical shift in discourse began with criticism of those artists who “kowtowed” to western culture and picked up pace after the 1948 party resolution condemning formalism, dissonance and other pernicious western/bourgeois influences in Soviet music. Consequently, jazz was erased from many of the areas of life where it had previously thrived. Because jazz was now considered an “unprincipled” and “pointless” art form, it was also unsuitable for Soviet entertainment where before it had been considered central. Jazz also became incompatible with Soviet racial and national values and was depicted as “cosmopolitan” and divorced from any kind of folk tradition, whether Soviet or African American. Jazz was quintessentially anti-national and, therefore, unsuitable for Soviet audiences. The genre was now also regarded as a threat to the Soviet homeland and patriotic fervor was harnessed against jazz, which was now a fifth column in the United States’ relentless pursuit of a globally dominant, capitalist empire. The combination of these different anti-jazz arguments projects a philosophy in late Stalinism that form is indivisible from content and that jazz could never be reconciled to Soviet values and anyone who thought this was possible was misguided, a liar, or an enemy.

This discursive turn inspired a myriad of official actions against jazz including the dismantling of orchestras and the persecution of prominent jazz musicians. Jazz orchestras were driven out of their traditional homes, saxophones were banned, and mass

media no longer carried or advertised jazz performances. The only way to survive, for many, was to give in to demands and eradicate jazz from orchestra repertoires.

Despite this turn of events, the Soviet jazz scene endured. Across the country, citizens continued to patronize and perform jazz. Men and women, especially youths, could still find opportunities, albeit fewer than before, to come together and socialize over jazz music, whether dancing in parks or clubs, or listening to gramophone records or shortwave radio in private homes. Most remarkably of all, jazz could be heard in gulag camps across the Soviet landscape and gulag jazz orchestras not only entertained fellow prisoners, but also camp commanders and members of the public who lived in the vicinity of the camps.

The Soviet jazz scene during these years was no longer the public sphere it had been since the early 1930s. It had morphed into a hybrid sphere that was part counterpublic and part *vnye*. The jazz counterpublic, recognizing its own subordinate status, welcomed those who, by engaging with jazz, believed that Soviet culture could be what it once was, more expansive than it had become. Those who participated in this counterpublic willingly entered a marginalized world, which, in the eyes of the regime, marked them as deviants. Alongside this counterpublic emerged the first signs of the *vnye* world that would eventually coalesce under the last generation of Soviet citizens. While authoritative discourse had yet to be divorced from its substantive meaning, many who engaged with jazz music willingly ignored this discourse or regarded jazz as something far more important and interesting than adherence to Soviet ideology.

This situation presents something of a paradox since, from the perspective of the counterpublic, people believed strongly in Soviet ideology, so strongly that they were

willing to offer alternative interpretations of it. From the perspective of *proto-vnye*, however, the Soviet jazz scene under late Stalinism foreshadowed the emergence of a system that was largely populated by people who were relatively disinterested in questions of Soviet policy and ideology and what a socialist society should look like. They were more concerned with living as cheerful a life as possible and surviving – a system that grew during the immediate post-Stalin years, coalesced in the late 1960s, and lasted until the Soviet order's collapse.

## CONCLUSION

While conducting research for this project in Moscow, I spoke to the matron of my dormitory about why I found Stalin-era jazz so interesting. I relayed my fascination with the seemingly bizarre situation in which an unambiguously American art form took root in a society that regarded the United States' as its mirror opposite. At this, the matron interjected, "That is all very interesting, but I must say that I do not consider jazz to be an American art form. It is a global art form." While this may have been obvious to her, such a statement would have been far more controversial during Stalin's reign. Although many jazz artists and fans would have readily agreed with such a statement, there were numerous others who believed jazz was explicitly an American art form. Some may have conceded that jazz was a "global" art form, but only because it was a tool of the international bourgeoisie, which utilized it to undermine the spread of proletarian revolution. This debate over jazz mirrored, in many ways, the debates about jazz that happened in every industrial society, including the United States, during the interwar years, but with local inflections specific to the Soviet Union.

In the preceding chapters, I have laid out how these debates and discussions are evidence of a limited, imperfect, and fragile public sphere in Stalin's Soviet Union. This public sphere was rooted in the Soviet jazz scene during the 1930s and 1940s and reproduced itself through a variety of means. Songwriters and performers, both professional and amateur, produced public "texts" in the songs that they wrote, composed, and performed for a broad audience of listeners. Audiences themselves participated in this sphere through their consumption of jazz, be it purchasing and listening to records, going to concerts, dancing to jazz in restaurants, parks, and clubs, or

listening to the radio. Other figures such as bureaucrats and cultural elites participated in this public sphere through its more traditional manifestations: public meetings of organizations like the composers' unions and, more importantly, state-run newspapers and journals, where jazz's critics and defenders articulated their opinions on jazz. The Soviet state mediated this public sphere through its censorship and ideological and cultural apparatus, by restricting the number of people who could utilize mass media to articulate their opinions, and in the way that venue managers booked jazz acts. At the same time, this mediation was never entirely uniform and it may be more accurate to consider bureaucrats and managers as individual participants in the public sphere rather than a uniform body of mediators.

On the surface, this public sphere revolved around questions specifically related to jazz, but the stakes were much higher than these questions suggest. Attitudes towards jazz reflected deeper attitudes towards Soviet social transformation and socialism itself. Sometimes these attitudes were articulated and expressed amidst the Stalinist regime's ambivalence to jazz, sometimes amidst acceptance, and sometimes, especially after the Great Patriotic War, overt hostility.

During the 1930s, jazz was increasingly integrated into Soviet leisure and as a result, it became the catalyst for debates about "culturedness" and the quest to forge the New Soviet Person. Jazz music could be heard in a wide variety of places during the decade, ranging from small venues like cafes and cinema foyers to parks and bandshells to some of the country's biggest theaters. It could also be heard on Soviet and foreign radio broadcasts and, for those who could afford them, on gramophone recordings. Jazz's pervasiveness in these spheres reflected a broad acceptance of jazz's place in Soviet

leisure culture, but also elicited much hand wringing and gnashing of teeth. Cultural elites, especially composers, musicologists and cultural moralists, could not believe that jazz would be allowed in venues and technologies that were meant to edify and acculturate the Soviet masses. Popular engagement with and debates over jazz were thus not merely an affirmation or criticism of jazz music itself, but were competing statements about what it meant to be “cultured” and what behaviors and morality should be affixed to the ideal-type New Soviet Person.

These debates regarding the New Soviet Person came into sharp focus in the celebrity status and persona of Leonid Utesov. Utesov’s career as a jazz singer and bandleader began its meteoric rise in 1929 and, although Utesov had a few influential allies in the Soviet entertainment industry early in his career, his popularity grew despite vocal objections to his jazz repertoire and performances in the Soviet press. Even after Utesov’s celebrity status was firmly established after his performance in the 1934 film, *The Merry Guys*, his public persona differed markedly from those of the hero-celebrities that the Stalinist regime feted. Audience “consumption” of Utesov’s public persona through his music, film, memoirs, and photograph signified a popular interpretation of the ideal Soviet citizen that, in many ways, contrasted with the regime’s interpretation.

As a local manifestation of a foreign art form, Stalin-era jazz music also facilitated a broad debate about the Soviet Union’s relationship with the West and with its own multi-ethnic population. Songwriters and musicians took center stage in this discussion since it was they who adopted foreign jazz or adapted jazz to a more specifically Soviet context. Through their song choices, these artists articulated their own perspectives on whether the Soviet Union should maintain its position as tribune and



advocate for the international proletariat, abandon strict proletarian internationalism and create a hybrid, cosmopolitan super-culture that incorporated the best aspects of western culture even if they originated in the bourgeois or aristocratic classes, or retreat from foreign cultural influences altogether and focus on building up the cultural sophistication and national consciousness of the Soviet Union's many ethnic groups. Most performers believed in a blending of these three paths and articulated this view by incorporating foreign jazz pieces (usually depicted as "negro" songs), jazz adaptations of the European classical canon, and jazzified songs from Soviet folk traditions. Crafting repertoire lists in such a fashion not only expressed the ways that jazz artists understood the Soviet Union's relationship to the West and its own population, but also defended the genre against attacks from critics who saw it as little more than a bourgeois Trojan Horse.

The debates that revolved around Soviet jazz during the 1930s took a back seat during the years of the Great Patriotic War, but this did not mean that the jazz public sphere went dormant. Instead, wartime jazz in the Soviet Union fostered a dialogue between artists and audiences (mediated by the state) about the reasons why Soviet citizens should fight the Germans. Songwriters and performers anticipated soldier and civilian desires, and through their song choices, attempted to articulate these reasons in order to mobilize them for the Soviet cause. Audiences, for their part, responded by either affirming or ignoring these songs. The result was that jazz ensembles projected diverse interpretations of "patriotism" that sometimes embraced and sometimes downplayed or ignored the role of the Russian nation, the Soviet state, or Stalin and his associates in favor of local attachments like hometown and family. Wartime jazz, therefore, facilitated

a conversation between diverse Soviet citizens about what “patriotic” meant in the context of “Great Patriotic War.”

Despite the propaganda role that jazz played in defending the Soviet homeland, the combination of Cold War paranoia regarding nefarious western influences in Soviet society and the need for domestic scapegoats to explain away the failed post-war recovery spelled doom for the jazz public sphere. Whereas before the Soviet jazz scene had been a space where diverse citizens could articulate their views regarding what it meant to be Soviet, jazz itself was now depicted as inherently anti-Soviet. Venues were shuttered, ensembles dismantled, and marquee artists forced to distance themselves from jazz, as many Soviet jazz fans now found themselves, without any change in behavior or thought on their part, marginalized as “accidental non-conformists.” In spite of jazz’s marginalization during the last years of Stalin’s reign, many Soviet citizens continued to engage with the genre in what was now a counterpublic. By listening to, playing, and socializing over jazz, fans expressed, not dissidence and opposition to the state, but a belief in a more open Soviet culture, than what was officially acceptable. Some of these jazz fans, through both their engagement with Soviet discourse and deliberate dismissal of anti-jazz ideology, exhibited characteristics of the *mye* culture that would become a hallmark of late socialism and would ultimately contribute to the downfall of the Soviet regime.

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