

## MUSICAL CENSORSHIP AND REPRESSION IN THE UNION OF SOVIET COMPOSERS: KHRENNIKOV PERIOD

Zehra Ezgi KARA<sup>1</sup>, Jülide GÜNDÜZ

### Abstract

In the beginning of 1930s, institutions like Association for Contemporary Music and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians were closed down with the aim of gathering every study of music under one center, and under the control of the Communist Party. As a result, all the studies were realized within the two organizations of the Composers' Union in Moscow and Leningrad in 1932, which later merged to form the Union of Soviet Composers in 1948. In 1948, composer Tikhon Khrennikov (1913-2007) was appointed as the first president of the Union of Soviet Composers by Andrei Zhdanov and continued this post until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Being one of the most controversial figures in the history of Soviet music, Khrennikov became the third authority after Stalin and Zhdanov in deciding whether a composer or an artwork should be censored or supported by the state. Khrennikov's main job was to ensure the application of socialist realism, the only accepted doctrine by the state, on the field of music, and to eliminate all composers and works that fell out of this context. According to the doctrine of socialist realism, music should formalize the Soviet nationalist values and serve the ideals of the Communist Party. Soviet composers should write works with folk music elements which would easily be appreciated by the public, prefer classical orchestration, and avoid atonality, complex rhythmic and harmonic structures. In this period, composers, performers or works that lacked socialist realist values were regarded as formalist. Khrennikov's big war against formalism started at the first congress of the Union of Soviet Composers held in April 1948. The process that started with the castigation of some important composers including Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian, lasted until the ban of the seven composers interested in innovative music trends in 1979, who are also known as the Khrennikov Seven. Comprised of Elena Firsova, Dmitri Smirnov, Alexander Knaifel, Viktor Suslin, Vyacheslav Artyomov, Sofia Gubaidulina and Edison Denisov, the Khrennikov Seven were condemned for attending some festivals in the West without permission, and their music was addressed as "meaningless and loud" by Khrennikov. These composers also had to endure travel and performance bans. In this article, Khrennikov's sanctions of 1948 and 1979, and their effects on composers and Soviet music in broad sense are analyzed.

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is prepared from the PhD dissertation, *Aesthetical and Technical Analysis of Selected Flute Works by Sofia Gubaidulina*, which is to be defended in January 2019, by Zehra Ezgi Kara under the advisory of Assoc. Prof. Jülide Gündüz, at Istanbul Technical University, Institute of Social Sciences Department of Music.

## Historical Background

Censorship in art has been experienced in different forms in every society throughout the history. It was either implemented by the state based on social, political and religious reasons, or self-imposed by individuals as a result of various oppression. The censorship which took place after the establishment of the Soviet Union was essentially aimed at creating national music in line with communist ideals. Following the October Revolution, the social and political chaos affected the cultural life directly; many art institutions collapsed and artists became silent or preferred to emigrate either because they did not sympathize with the Bolsheviks or because of their professional concerns. For example, Sergei Rachmaninov left the country for good, only a few weeks after the revolution. Sergei Prokofiev followed him a year later and returned permanently in 1936. Igor Stravinsky who already worked in Europe with Ballet Russes of Diaghilev during the Revolution did not return to Soviet Union until 1962 (Frolova-Walker, 2012: xiii).

Most of the early musical policy of the Soviet Union was designed by Narkompros<sup>2</sup> and its musical division, MUZO. Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was the first Commissar of Narkompros who served until 1929. Lunacharsky was regarded as the highest authority of art and literature policies. He handled the issue with a great deal of intelligence and sensitivity. He argued that Soviet art should rise over the rich heritage of the past and therefore the revolutionary staff must assimilate the cultural heritage. Because of his sympathy for radicals in art and literature, Lunacharsky built a bridge between artists and Lenin who did not favor modernism (Bowlit, 1976: xxxiii).

Lenin supported the mass popularization of art which should reflect the ideology of communism. He expected composers to create music which could be easily understood by the people and boost their morale. Although there were some uncertainties and disagreements about what kind of music could serve this purpose, the works outside this mission were criticized and even censored by the state in the following years.

During the New Economic Policy (1921-1928) musicians had relatively more freedom. Many musical associations and communities embracing different sense of art were established. The establishment of two independent and uncompromising musicians' associations in 1923, *the Association of Contemporary Music* (ASM) and *the Association of Proletarian Musicians* (RAPM) was the most spectacular demonstration of the pluralism in this period. The ASM represented the modernists in Moscow and argued that the revolution had to be innovative and needed new forms of expression. It was an alternative organization of Russian composers who were interested in new techniques and modern aesthetics in music. The strongest opponent of ASM was RAPM which was essentially founded to provide a consulting body and organizational assistance to *Agitation and Propaganda Department* of the Communist Party. RAPM persisted in the Revolution which was made for the proletariat, therefore the music should have been beneficial and understood by them (Maes, 2002: 246-252).

By the middle of 1929, RAPM gained administrative power by gradually taking control of music publications, censorship organs, publishing houses and media. In favor of the proletariat, RAPM made some changes which include the prohibition of the performance and publication of

---

<sup>2</sup> Narkompros (People's Commissariat for Education) was the Soviet agency founded within the weeks of the October Revolution, led by Anatoly Lunacharsky. It was in charge with the administration of public education and included subdivisions for theaters (TEO), the fine arts (IZO) and music (MUZO).

modernist works, the change of the mission of the state orchestras and theaters, the removal of ideologically inappropriate works from the repertoire, the reorganization of conservatories for the sake of mass education and the modification of opera and musical theaters to fit the revolutionary tastes. Additionally, musical criticism came under the domination of the RAPM which put a lot of pressure on many composers and performers (Darby, 1999: 87). Shostakovich's first opera *The Nose* (1928) and Prokofiev's ballet in two scenes *the Steel Step* (1926) were among the works that have received such criticism and censorship. *The Nose* was removed from the upcoming performance list of the Bolshoy Theater in Moscow and the Maliy Opera Theater in Leningrad after the publication of the criticism stating that it was a "ridiculous anecdote". A performance of Prokofiev's *the Steel Step* at the Bolshoy was also cancelled (Yabukov, 1995: 199).

The transformation of Puccini's *Tosca* into a revolutionary opera in the Paris Commune and the adaptation of Meyerbeer's opera *the Huguenots as the Decembrists* are the most remarkable examples of musical regulation to update classical operas in order to reflect the ideals of the Revolution. In addition, the libretto of Glinka's opera *Ivan Susanin* was changed from "glory be to our Russian Tsar" to "glory be to our native land" (Slonimsky, 1944: 11).

The RAPM did not accept any modern Western or Russian school except Beethoven, Mussorgsky and Russian National School. Modern approaches in composition would be criticized severely. Under the hegemony of the RAPM from 1928 to 1932, simple harmonic writing, 4/4 (march) time and major tonality were almost obligatory for producing simple music free of all artistic assertion. 4/4 time was considered to be the natural rhythm of the masses. Although RAPM was not officially supported by the state, its repressive authority lasted until 1932 (Slonimsky, 2004: 162).

### Union of Soviet Composers

On April 23, 1932, the Party Resolution entitled *On the Reconstruction (perestroika) of Literary and Artistic Organizations* ordered the centralization of all independent artistic organizations, so that all artistic disciplines would be directly under the control of the Party. In accordance with this purpose, a separate union was created for each artistic discipline where membership was mandatory. RAPM, ASM and Proletkult were merged under the *Moscow Composers Union* and the *Leningrad Composers Union*, until they were unified under the name of Union of Soviet Composers (USC) in 1948 (Viljaen, 2005: 24).

The perestroika (re-construction) period that began with the 1932 resolution ended the power of the proletarian groups and liberated the Soviet composers from the repressive dogmas of RAPM. Nonetheless, Schwarz (1976: 110) asserts that the resolution "signified the end of an era of flexibility and inaugurated one of regimentation [...] Little did they realize that they exchanged the dictatorship of a small clique for the control of a super-power, the Soviet government and the bureaucratic machinery of the Party." According to him, perestroika seemed to end RAPM's oppression, but it actually created a far more comprehensive control mechanism.

The Union of Soviet Composers which provided centralization of Soviet music were largely governed by bureaucrats. Nikolai Chelyapov, who was appointed to the presidency of the Moscow Composers Union and the editor of the *Sov'yetskaya muzika* (Soviet music), was not a musician but a bureaucrat who was responsible for the Artistic Affairs Committee of Narkompros. Chelyapov's appointment allowed the Soviet State to retain control entirely in the field of music (Maes, 2002: 254). The composers were obliged to attend the USC meetings where their works were discussed,

examined and criticized by their colleagues and refusing to attend these meetings was considered as a sign of bourgeois individualism and the expulsion from the Union, would certainly mean the end of the career (Fairclough, 2006: 12).

### **Socialist Realism and Formalism in Soviet Music**

The doctrine of socialist realism and formalism are the two important elements that must be understood in order to define Soviet art in the post-1930s. In 1934, the Communist Party ordered all artistic spheres to express socialist ideology through traditional forms. This officially approved doctrine was called *socialist realism* which was initially described in the Soviet Writers' Union with the participation of Joseph Stalin, Maxim Gorky, Nikolai Bukharin and Andrei Zhdanov:

Socialist Realism, being the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must co-exist with the goal of ideological change and education of the workers in the spirit of socialism (Volkov, 2004: 16).

The necessity of socialist realism was announced with the following words by Stalin in 1934: "The development of cultures that are national in form and socialist in content is necessary for the purpose of their ultimate fusion into one general culture, socialist both as to form and content, and expressed in one general language" (Taruskin, 2016: 263).

Lenoid Heller (1997) divides the core concepts of the socialist realist aesthetics into three categories; "an ideological commitment, a national/popular spirit and party-mindedness." The ideological commitment defines the relationship between the content and an approved thought; this means that the formal structure should not dominate the content. The concept of a national or popular spirit refers that art must express the will of the people and should be accessible to them. The third category, party-mindedness requires the artwork to support the Party vigorously and to help building socialism. Although the theoretical discussions on socialist realism first appeared in the field of literature, eventually it demanded that all fields of art reveal the works of the struggles and the supreme victories of the proletariat (Tompkins, 2013: 17-18).

According to Slonimsky (1944: 6), the concept of socialist realism did not have a fixed goal. It rather specified a direction just as in the words of Stalin "socialist in content and national in form." Due to the fact that the outline of the concept was unsettled, it was very difficult to define it in a musical sense. The painters, for instance, produced praiseworthy works on the achievements of Stalin's first and second Five Year Plans. However, the adaptation of socialist realism in musical composition was much more complex due to its abstract nature

In order to fulfill the requirements of socialist realism in music, cultural officials demanded to compose text-based works containing ideological messages supported by the Party. Instrumental music was supposed to be melodic and vivid enough to be easily understood by the masses. In addition, it was essential to base the new works on great masters of the past to preserve the national musical tradition and to compose in accordance with the communist ideology (Tompkins, 2013: 18).

Composers who did not comply with these principles were labeled as formalists. Formalism became a concept that included all modernist movements and composition techniques such as using dissonance, atonality and twelve-tone. In other words, formalism included all abstract ideas that did not belong to Soviet nationalism and were borrowed from the West.

To understand what formalism is from the point of musicians, it would be appropriate to mention the composers' own explanations. The term formalism was used so roughly that Prokofiev once stated that "formalism is really the name that they give here to music which cannot be understood on the first listening." Similarly, Shostakovich stated: "If you set verses, it would seem, there's your content, if you don't, there's your formalism" (Schwarz, 1976: 115; Fay, 2005: 88).

The first brutal criticism for being in line with formalist values was Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth* which had been staged for two years and achieved great success. An article entitled *Chaos Instead of Music* was published on January 28, 1936 in *Pravda*, attacking Shostakovich as follows:

The young composer, instead of hearing serious business-like criticism, which could have helped him in his future work, hears only enthusiastic compliments. From the first minute, the listener is shocked by deliberate dissonance, by a confused stream of sounds. Snatches of melody, the beginnings of a musical phrase, are drowned, emerge again, and disappear in a grinding and squealing roar. To follow this 'music' is most difficult; to remember it, impossible...The power of good music to infect the masses has been sacrificed to a petty-bourgeois, formalist attempt to create originality through cheap clowning. It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly. The danger of this trend to Soviet music is clear (Seroff, 1970: 205).

As *Pravda* was the official voice of the Communist Party, this condemnation created fear in the musical community, because the applaudable opera they support suddenly turned out to be bourgeois formalism in music. It was a turning point for Soviet musicians and marked the beginning of the official attack towards music. Another *Pravda* article published ten days later criticized Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream* for its failure to reach the masses and for being artificial and formalist.

Prokofiev experienced similar challenges and suffered many corrections and obstacles after he returned to the Soviet Union in 1936. The stage dramas *Boris Godunov* (1936) and *Eugene Onegin* (1937) along with his music for the projected film *The Queen of Spades* (1936) were canceled for containing formalist elements. *Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October* (1936-37) was barred from performance with harsh criticism by the Committee of Artistic Affairs in 1937. Even though it was composed to impress the Soviet authorities, the result was not as expected. Some critics found it satirical to arrange Lenin's, Marx's and Stalin's words to ensure musical integration (Morrison and Kravetz, 2006: 262).

Following his pathetic experience, Prokofiev worked tirelessly in order to get approval from the Soviet authorities. He knew his subsequent works had to be completely in line with the requirements of socialist realism. In 1938, he composed music for Sergei Eisenstein's film, *Alexander Nevsky* which achieved great success and became popular. A year after he was asked to compose *Zdravitsa* (Hail to Stalin) for Stalin's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. He had a dilemma between his own internal artistic prodigies and his adherence to the rules of socialist realism. To avoid any possible mistakes, he designed a libretto based on the poems for Stalin including following lines:

There has never been a field so green  
 The village is filled with unheard of happiness  
 Our life has never been so happy  
 Our rye has hitherto never been so plentiful.

*Zdravitsa* became one of the best Soviet compositions depicting the love of the people for Stalin (Morrison and Kravetz, 2006: 251). Offering fairytale images by using such libretto during a period of mass hunger and deportation reveals Prokofiev's confusion clearly.

The break from the music policies of the 1930s started with the occupation of the Soviet Union by the Nazis in 1941. In this period, the Communist Party abandoned anti-Western rhetoric and concentrated on patriotic propaganda because of its alliance with some Western powers. Nevertheless, with the victory after the war, Soviet people began to re-establish their cultural life and the emphasis on patriotism during the war left its place to ideological conflicts and former hostilities. The communist Party increased control once again. Stalin appointed Andrei Zhdanov to provide a return to socialist realist policies and to struggle against formalism in 1946.

### **Works And Career of Tikhon Khrennikov**

Tikhon Khrennikov was born in 1913 in Russia. His musical ability appeared at a very young age, he started to play the piano at the age of nine and soon began composing.

Russian Jewish composer and teacher, Mikhail Gnessin appreciated his works, and the following year, he was accepted to Gnessin College where he studied with Gnessin himself and Litinsky. In 1932, he attended to Moscow Conservatory where he studied composition under Vissarion Shebalin and piano under Heinrich Neuhaus (Hakobian, 2017: 116).

Khrennikov composed his Piano Concerto No. 1 (1932) and his Symphony No. 1 (1933-35) while he was still a student at the conservatory. His Piano Concerto in F contained influences of modern composers such as Hindemith and Prokofiev. He should have thought that such modernist connotations would cause him trouble, therefore, he added a finale movement immediately after the premiere. The new movement consisted of a folk-like thematic material in a more romantic style. At that time, it was remarkable that Khrennikov frequently played his Piano Concerto in his concerts. The skill and performance of the young composer led some music critics to call him *the Moscow Shostakovich* (Hakobian, 2017: 116).

The idea that Khrennikov was a counterpart to Shostakovich was basically accepted after the premiere of his Symphony No. 1 in B flat minor. The symphony was his graduation work, it had great success and aroused interest among the famous conductors such as Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy, which means that before becoming a music authority in the USSR, Khrennikov was already recognized as a prominent composer whose works were performed by national and foreign orchestras. In the 1930s, a newly graduated young composer, Khrennikov already began to play an important role in Soviet music.

After graduating from the conservatory, he wrote an article in Pravda entitled *Not All is Well in the Union of Soviet Composers*. He criticized the Union and particularly Nikolay Chelyapov, the chairman of the Moscow branch, for not being accessible and that the composers had difficulties setting up appointments with him. Khrennikov also stated that the Union failed to fulfill its mission successfully, simply because Dzerzhinsky's opera was never discussed at the meetings. Khrennikov continued his accusations, although Chelyapov was arrested and executed in two years after this article was published (Tassie, 2014: 325).

Khrennikov also wrote some music for theatre and cinema, his first great success came with his incidental music for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1936). However, the turning point of his career was his opera *Into the Storm* (1939) which was composed after the novel *Loneliness* by Nikolay Virta. Although this was an ordinary Civil War story, the distinguishing

feature of the opera was Lenin's appearance on the opera stage for the first time through a spoken dialogue with the hero and a peasant. The opera was premiered in Moscow by famous director Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and it was a great success. Stalin also attended one of the Moscow performances and gave his approval. After the meetings at the Union, Khrennikov's *Into the Storm* was recognized as the second great victory of the Soviet opera after Derzhinsky's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (Hakobian, 2017: 117). In 1942, he consolidated his success by winning his first Stalin Prize with *Song of Moscow* written for a film entitled *They Met in Moscow*.

Khrennikov was a very prolific composer during the Soviet-German War as well. Apart from composing many songs, film musics and a symphony, he also visited the front-line troops a few times and gave concerts for the soldiers. His music was very optimistic and earned admiration of many people. He proved himself both in light and serious music. Thus, he was actually an appropriate candidate for all the authorization to be given. In addition, he was pure Russian and son of a proletarian family. Also, he was politically immaculate in contrast to his counterparts (Hakobian, 2017: 118). Apart from his administrative affairs, Khrennikov continued to work as a pianist and composer throughout his career.

### **Tikhon Khrennikov And The 1948 Decree**

After the war, Zhdanov launched a series of ideological campaigns to rebuild the Party line in art. The Communist Party once again emphasized anti-Westernism and encouraged artists, writers, intellectuals and composers to produce works including themes of the Russian Revolution and nationalism. Beginning in August 1946, the period in which intelligentsia were subjected to various repression, is known as *zhdanovshchina*<sup>3</sup> and it started with three Central Committee resolutions on literature, theater, and film.

On February 10, 1948, Central Committee's final resolution of the *zhdanovshchina* *On the Opera Velikaia Druzhba by V. Muradeli* was an attack on music field and it became a turning point in Soviet musical life in terms of censorship and criticism. The starting point of this resolution was Zhdanov's attendance to the premiere of Muradeli's opera *Velikaia Druzhba* (the Great Friendship) which dealt with war between the Reds and Whites in the Caucasus. After the premiere, Zhdanov summoned a three-day meeting with composers where he attacked Muradeli's opera for being expressionless, poor, incompatible and denounced it for being formalist (Schonberg, 2013: 498). He referred to 1936 Pravda article *Muddle Instead of Music* and stated that formalism still existed. In the meeting, composer Vladimir Zakharov questioned: "Shostakovich's Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth symphonies are supposed to be considered as works of genius abroad, but who considers them as such?" Considering the musical circles' respect for Shostakovich, Tikhon Khrennikov, a politically talented younger composer, criticized him carefully without targeting him personally: "The Leningrad<sup>4</sup> was described as a work of stupendous genius besides which Beethoven was a mere pup" (Ross, 2007: 276).

Even though the starting point seemed to be Muradeli's opera, the resolution pointed out Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khatchaturian, Shebalin, Popov, and Miaskovsky for being the pioneers of formalism and demanded Soviet composers to return to the traditions of Russian music (Tassie, 2014: 276; Rubsamen, 1951: 268-269). Starting with the anti-formalist campaign against

<sup>3</sup> The Zhdanov Doctrine, also known as Zhdanovism. Although Zhdanov died in 1948, the Zhdanov doctrine remained as a State policy until the death of Stalin in 1953 (Smrž, 2005: 37).

<sup>4</sup> Leningrad Symphony: Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 60.

Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* in 1936, political interference on the music field reached its peak with this resolution.

Another series of meetings were held between February 17 and 26, again under the chairmanships of Zhdanov and Khrennikov at which some prominent composers had to apologize for the *worthless* music they composed. At the General Assembly of Soviet Composers, Zhdanov stated that Muradeli's opera *Great Friendship* turned out to be a failure. He noted that the main defect of the opera was its inability to reach the people due to the lack of a single memorable melody. Zhdanov criticized the Committee of Fine Arts, especially its chairman Comrade Khrapchenko for publishing this opera to a great extent and spending six-hundred-thousand rubles on its production at the Moscow Bolshoi Theater alone. According to Zhdanov, this irresponsibility, which directed the government to spend money in large quantities, showed that the Committee of Fine Arts was inadequate for leadership in art.

Khrennikov, who would be appointed as the General Secretary of the Composers Union at the end of these meetings, took even a tougher line in his famous speech. He stated that the resolution was very important for the destiny of Soviet music. According to him, the resolution was a definite blow to anti-democratic formalism and modernist tendencies in Soviet music and it directed Soviet composers to realism, to the path of true democratic art. Part of his historical speech is as follows<sup>5</sup>:

In the music of these composers we witness a revival of anti-realistic decadent influences calculated to destroy the principles of classical music. These tendencies are peculiar to the bourgeois movement of the era of imperialism: the rejection of melodiousness in music, neglect of vocal forms, infatuation with rhythmic and orchestral effects, the piling-up of noisy ear-splitting harmonies, intentional illogicality and unemotionality of music. All these tendencies lead in actual fact to the liquidation of music as one of the strongest expressions of human feelings and thoughts (Slonimsky, 1994: 1059).

He first pointed out that formalist distortions and anti-democratic tendencies were found in the works of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Popov, Miaskovsky, Shebalin and some other composers. Complaining that the composers drove audiences away, Khrennikov declared some works scapegoat including Muradeli's opera *Great Friendship*, Prokofiev's *Festive Poem*, *the Mighty Land* and *the Sixth Symphony*; Miaskovsky's *Pathetic Overture* and the cantata *Kremlin at Night*; Shostakovich's *Poem of Fatherland* and *Khachaturian's Symphonie-Poeme*.

Khrennikov accused Khachaturian and Prokofiev of doing formalist experiments and writing impracticable orchestral combinations like inclusion of twenty-four trumpets in Khachaturian's *Symphonie-Poeme* and scoring for sixteen double-basses, eight harps and four pianos in Prokofiev's *Ode to the End of the War*. He claimed that the irrational use of orchestral sonorities meant nothing more than creating astonishment among listeners. He also denounced the *Eighth* and *Ninth Symphonies of Shostakovich* and the *Piano Sonatas* of Prokofiev for their neurotic content, "escape into a region of abnormal" and for being "tenseness, repulsive and pathological" (Slonimsky, 1994: 1059).

---

<sup>5</sup> Slonimsky, Nicolas (Ed).1994. *Music since 1900*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 1055-1067. (All references to the declarations at the meetings are written on the basis of the original transcripts published by Slonimsky (1994). The documents can also be accessed through the following link: <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/zhdanov/zhdanov-texts/discussion-at-a-general-assembly-of-soviet-composers/>, Retrieved March 26, 2018.)



Another typical expression of formalism for Khrennikov was the non-use of Russian folk songs or the arrangement of them in an “overcomplex decadent manner alien to folk art.” Therefore, he denounced Popov’s *Third Symphony* on Spanish Themes, and arrangements of Russian folk songs by Prokofiev.

Khrennikov defined formalism as “a revelation of emptiness and lack of ideas in art.” According to him, the rejection of ideas would reveal the concept of “art for arts’ sake, a cult of pure form, a cult of technical devices as a goal in itself” and this concept destroys the integrity and harmony in art. He stated that “the cultivation of form as a goal in art leads in the end to the disintegration of the form itself and to the loss of high-quality professional mastery” (Slonimsky, 1994: 1060). Khrennikov criticized this kind of subjective idealism, in which the artist became appraiser of his own art. Ingratiating himself into Zhdanov’s favour, Khrennikov often referred to his speech:

Comrade Zhdanov has said in this connection that if an artist does not expect to be understood by his contemporaries, it leads to desolation, to an impasse. If a true artist, says Comrade Zhdanov, finds that his work is not understood by the listeners, he must figure out first of all why he failed to please the people, why the people cannot understand him (Slonimsky, 1994: 1060).

Indicating that the music of the Soviet composers since the 1920’s contained many formalist items, Khrennikov condemned the half of the Soviet composers’ works in early twentieth century. A significant part of denounced composers and their works are as follows: Shostakovich’s opera *The Nose*, *Symphony Nos. 2, 3, 8, 9* and *Second Piano Sonata*; Prokofiev’s ballets *The Prodigal Son*, *On the Boristhenes*, *Pas Dacier* and his operas *The Flaming Angel*, *War and Peace*, *Symphony Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6*, *Piano Concerto*, *Fifth Piano Sonata*, and a number of piano works; Khachaturian’s *Symphonie-Poeme*; Mossolov’s *Iron Foundry*, *Newspaper Advertisements*; Knipper’s opera *North Wind*, *Tales of a Porcelain Buddha*; Shebalin’s *Lenin Symphony*, *Symphony No. 2*, *the Quartet and String Trio*; Popov’s *Symphony No. 1*; Liatoshinsky’s *Symphony No. 2* and songs; Boelza’s *Symphony Nos. 1, 2* and songs; Litinsky’s: *Quartets and Sonatas*; Shcherbachev’s *Symphony No. 3*, Popov’s *Symphony No. 3*, Miaskovsky’s *Symphony Nos. 10, 13*, *Third Piano Sonata*, *Fourth Piano Sonata*, etc.

Khrennikov also declared that formalist tendencies reflected strongly in the education of younger composers. He stated that treading in Shostakovich and Prokofiev’s footsteps, degenerate themes, exoticism and mysticism became widespread among them. He continued his condemnation, accusing other professors of the Moscow Conservatory:

Formalistic distortions are also strongly reflected in the education of young composers in conservatories, particularly in the Moscow Conservatory. This is obviously connected with the fact that some composers mentioned in the resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party as representative of the formalistic movement (Shostakovich, Shebalin and Miaskovsky) are professors of the Moscow Conservatory and Shebalin is its director (Slonimsky, 1994: 1061).

It was obvious that such criticism could have harmful consequences due to the environment and Zhdanov’s cruel campaign against formalism. After many years, in an interview with Eichler (2007), Khrennikov stated that he did not write that speech himself and he had no other option. It was just a task that the Central Committee had imposed on him. He stated he was compelled to make that speech as the Party discipline was so strong and added that it did not affect the creative activity of the composers. For him, it was no harm to them.

When observed from the perspective of the composers, the situation was not as Khrennikov mentioned. Although he once stated that he was also a victim himself and it was the most tragic event in his life, it does not change the fact that his words made the composers' lives much more miserable than his own misery.

Following the Congress, all condemned composers were dismissed from their professional posts and their works were barred from performance which caused them pecuniary loss and intangible damages. Shostakovich was dismissed from his teaching posts at the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories on the grounds of professional inadequacy and lost his only regular income. Besides, many of his works were barred from performance. Shebalin was dismissed from Moscow Conservatory Directorate. The concert and theater managers removed Prokofiev's works from the repertoire and his works were also barred from performance. Along with Muradeli's opera, forty-two other works by thirteen composers were suppressed (Macdonald, 1990: 196-197; Jaffé, 2012: 80; Morrison, 2009: 314).

The composers' acceptance of their guilt in response to February Resolution, which was condemning, accusing and censoring them, reveal how they actually suffered under oppression. Muradeli, for instance, immediately accepted the blame and said: "How could it have happened that I failed to introduce a single folk song in the score of my opera? It seems strange and almost incredible to me and can be explained only as a manifestation of my inherent snobbishness. I will try with all my heart to earn the right to continue my devoted service to our Soviet music."

Shostakovich stated that the criticism of the Party was strong but fair and it made him focus on the works of the Russian national art more intensely. Facing his colleagues, Shostakovich promised to utilize folkloric melodies and write songs and romances in his future works (Fay, 2005: 167). Shostakovich conveyed his apology to the General Assembly as follows:

I know that the Party is right; I know that the Party shows solicitude for Soviet art and for me as a Soviet composer... I am deeply grateful for it and for all the criticism contained in the resolution... I shall try again and again to create symphonic works close to the spirit of the people from the standpoint of ideological subject matter, musical language and form. I shall still more determinedly work on the musical depiction of the images of the heroic Soviet people... I shall again and again try to create Soviet mass songs.

Khachaturian stated that the Party Resolution fully reflected the musical perspective of the Soviet people and it brought liberation to Soviet musicians. "We feel easier, more free" he said, and continued "What can be higher and nobler than writing music understandable to our people and to give joy by our creative art to millions?" Among the composers accused of formalism, only Myaskovsky kept his silence (Tassie, 2014: 276). Prokofiev stated that his health condition prevented him from participation in the Soviet Composers Assembly. Therefore, he sent a letter of apology to Khrennikov stating that the resolution "separated decayed tissue in the composers' creative production from the healthy part" (Slonimsky, 1994: 1064).

Following the meetings, a humiliating public apology was published, bearing the signatures of the accused composers. Composers stated that they were "tremendously grateful" to the Central Committee and Comrade Stalin for the "severe but profoundly just criticism of the present state of Soviet music" (Slonimsky, 1994: 1065). In this letter, the composers acknowledged that they moved away from socialist realism and confirmed that they would use their artistic mastery to reflect the lives and struggles of the Soviet people:

Not for the snobs should sound our music, but for our whole great people... We shall give all our strength to the new and unparalleled great flowering of Soviet musical art... We give to you and to the whole Soviet people a sworn pledge that we shall direct our work along the path

of socialist realism, tirelessly laboring to create, in all musical forms, models worthy of our great epoch, striving to make our music beloved by the whole great Soviet people, so that the great ideas that inspire our nation in its universally historic deeds of valor shall find living and vivid expression in our art... Long live our leader and teacher, father of the nation, great Stalin! (Slonimsky, 1994: 1066).

As a result of the meetings, on February 26, the Central Committee appointed Tikhon Khrennikov as the General Secretary of the Composers Union ahead of the All-Union Congress of Composers in April. With this appointment, an ardent supporter of Zhdanov in attacks on formalist composers became the third major force after Stalin and Zhdanov in pursue of Soviet music policies. Two months after the February Resolution, the first All-Union Congress was held in Moscow between April 19 and 25, 1948, which was a complete revision in Soviet music.

Formalists were once more invited to convey their apologies at the Congress. Many of them did not appear. One participant stated that it was a silence conspiracy. Shostakovich went to the podium to give another apology, which he later pointed out that the text he read was given to him by a Party official in the very last minute. He later described this humiliating moment as follows: "I read like the most paltry wretch, a parasite, a puppet, a cut-out paper doll on a string!" (Ross, 2007: 279; Wilson, 1994: 294).

The effects of the 1948 policies continued until the Khrushchev era (1953-64) which provided relief in terms of repression and censorship. After Stalin's death in 1953, modern Western composition was reintroduced into the curriculum. Besides, 1948 policies began to be re-evaluated following the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Eventually, the leaders admitted that the works of denounced composers were not actually "representatives of the antidemocratic, formalist trend in music". Some of the accusations in the 1948 decree were withdrawn by the Central Committee and 1958 decree marked the first time Central Committee officially corrected itself in the field of music. Khrennikov later claimed that he convinced Khrushchev that the leading Soviet composers should get acquitted from the unfair disgrace of 1948 (Schwarz, 1976: 215, Bittner, 2008: 70-71). However, within this ten-year period, Soviet music and its composers were damaged irreparably.

### **Khrennikov Seven**

From the mid-1970s on, the non-conformist tendency was no longer marginal and began to gain international dignity. The first symbolic event in this period was the premier of Schnittke's *First Symphony* in 1974. Consisting of enigmatic musical quotations from Tchaikovsky, Strauss and Chopin along with some jazz improvisations, the symphony also includes a theatrical feature such as the musicians coming to the stage a few minutes after the beginning of the symphony and leaving altogether during the final movement except the solo violinist who plays a theme from Haydn's symphony. The world premiere of Schnittke's poly-stylistic symphony was in the city of Gorki because he could not get permission to perform it in Moscow. Besides, Khrennikov stated that Schnittke should not compose because he did not have enough skills required for composing (Schnittke and Ivashkin, 2002: xxii; Service, 2013).

Khrennikov's condescending attitude towards avant-garde composers was not limited to this incident. When Denisov presented his *Italian Songs, Three Pieces for Piano Four Hands and Romantic Music* to Khrennikov on September 18, 1970, he said "all of this is just a waste of time" (Kholopov and Tsenova, 2005: 21).

Although non-conformist composers were restricted by the music authorities and the Ministry of Culture, they were allowed to perform in a limited fashion. However, the most striking censorship in this period emerged with Khrennikov's accusation of avant-garde composers at the Sixth Congress of the Soviet Composers (1979). Khrennikov pointed out his opposition to them and especially sneered at the distressed effects of their works and described them as music written "for the sake of sonoristic combinations and eccentric effects in which musical thought drowns in a frenzied torrent of noise, harsh outcries and unintelligible mutterings" (Hakobian, 2017: 203; Jones, 2015: 1003).

The most vital part of his speech was a passage in which he mocked a contemporary Soviet music festival entitled *Encounter with the Soviet Union* in Cologne in March, 1979. He compared participant and non-participant composers and listed seven composers who would not be accepted as real representatives of Soviet music:

Here one did not find music by Prokofieff, Myaskovsky, Khachaturyan, Karayev, Shchedrin, Eshpai, Boris Chaikovsky, or Kancheli. Rather, it so happened that in the festival program one found mainly the names of those whom the organizers considered worthy representatives of the Soviet avant-garde: Elena Firsova, Dmitry Smirnov, Alexander Knaifel, Victor Suslin, Vyacheslav Artyomov, Sofia Gubaidulina and Edison Denisov. A somewhat one-sided picture, wouldn't you say? (Taruskin, 2016: 318).

These composers were condemned for their unapproved participation to the festival. Khrennikov addressed their music as "meaningless and loud" and they were put on some performance and travel restrictions. A boycott particularly affecting Denisov and his students Firsova and Smirnov were imposed across the country. The restriction in Denisov's music also crossed the state borders. The concert programs were changed and Denisov's compositions were withdrawn from the events. For example, *The Sun of the Incas* to be performed in Sofia was banned and it was cancelled in Austria in 1981 along with *Silhouettes* and *Ode* (Kholopov and Tsenova, 2005: 25-33). Khrennikov's condemnation also caused serious economic difficulties for Gubaidulina and Suslin.

Inexplicably, other composers whose works were also performed at the same festival were not listed. Among them were Sergey Slonimsky, Arvo Pärt, Alfred Schnittke, Valentin Silvestrov and Dmitri Shostakovich (Jaffé, 2012: 181). Despite being a non-conformist composer, Schnittke's exclusion from the list was one of the cases many musicians wondered about. Kurtz (2007) explains that excluding him from the list was a kind of official apology. Because when Schnittke made his first concert tour to the West in 1977, Khrennikov's office started a rumor that the composer was trying to take refuge.

According to Taruskin, the list of banned composers in 1948 and 1979 were not only related to their artistry, but also to the bilateral relations of them and the officials who wrote the lists. He states that Khrennikov condemned composers who were in opposition to the Union for the reason that he could no longer control them and prevent their spread (Taruskin, 2016: 319).

On the contrary, Khrennikov never accepted that they were banned. In an interview with Anders Beyer (as cited in Schmelz, 2009: 185), he stated that avant-garde composers complained that their works were forbidden, but that was not the case. He said that they complained because they were a small coterie that was not supported by broader musical circles. Khrennikov expressed that their works were only performed less than the others, but no one censored them.

In his memoirs *Tak eto bïlo* (That's how it was) published in 1994, he further explained that the USC never had a campaign against the avant-garde composers. He continued his evaluation as follows:

When the Ministry of Culture asked me how our affairs stood, I answered that we had a normal creative situation with naturally varying creative opinions and artistic tastes, that we decided all questions independently and did not require decrees of any kind... In any case, no one was ever expelled from our union because of a passion for modern [i.e., avantgarde] music. And only... two composers, Andrey Volkonsky and Arvo Pärt, ever left the union and emigrated abroad, both of their own volition<sup>6</sup> (as quoted in Schmelz, 2009: 185).

Although censorship and sanctions were reduced compared to 1948, the composers were still exposed to various forms of disguised restrictions. Rostropovich's open letter to the editors-in-chief of some newspapers in 1970 proves such restrictions: "In 1948 there were *lists* of banned compositions. Now they prefer *oral bans*, citing that there is *an opinion*, that it is not recommended" (Schmelz, 2009: 186).

For example, Gubaidulina's spiritual music was suppressed because of the official disapproval of religious faith. Her *Seven Words* (1982) based upon Christ's seven last words on the cross was first performed in Moscow under the abstract title *Partita*. Nevertheless, she looked on the bright side of being blacklisted and stated that it gave her "artistic freedom" and she could write what she wanted "without compromise." Gubaidulina, comparing her period with that of 1948, said: "Shostakovich withdrew works rather than face jail under Stalin... Withdrawn the music! Who wants to go to jail? I was freer than him or Prokofiev. They suffered so much from politics. We didn't. It wasn't life or death for us" (Jones, 2015: 1003).

Being victims of censorship actually worked as a promotional activity for Khrennikov Seven. This allowed them to become more popular in the West. Elena Firsova, stated that domestic boycott, led to a greater attention of her music abroad and it worked like an advertisement. Looking on the bright side, Firsova's husband, Dmitry Smirnov expressed "sometimes obstacles themselves generate strong and powerful impulses towards overcoming these challenges and Russian contemporary music is a good example of this" (Eicher, 2007).

## Conclusion

Compared to the Lenin/Lunacharsky period, Khrennikov period, under the influence of Stalin, had much more strict policies and severe sanctions in the field of music. There was an increasing pressure on composers in the Soviet Union, especially in the 1930s.

The composers who embraced the notion of melody as a basis for good music and so made the songs for the masses were rewarded, others were accused of being formalists and subjected to serious sanctions. The composers who came to the forefront with their fresh, vigorous and beautiful melodies like Kabalevsky, Khrennikov, Schedrin and Tischenko could keep up with the system. However, many prominent composers of the time, like Prokofiev, Khachaturyan, and Shostakovich were seriously damaged due to the restrictions, restraint and expulsions. The performance and publication of their works were restrained, their derogatory apology letters were published in newspapers and their sources of income were seized. For instance, Shostakovich was expelled from his teaching posts at the Conservatories of Moscow and Leningrad, while Shebalin was dismissed from the office of the conservatory directorate.

<sup>6</sup> Tikhon Khrennikov's speech was published in *Sovetskaya kul'tura* with the title (Art belongs to the people) *Iskusstvo prinadlezhit narodu* (Taruskin, 2016: 330).

There are many differences between the Zhdanov/Khrennikov decree of 1948 and Khrennikov Seven of 1979. In 1948, Khrennikov was a thirty-five-year-old composer, appointed by Zhdanov and made speeches under his command. In 1979, he was sixty-six years old and a member of the Central Committee. This time, his speeches were written in line with his demands by the officers worked at his command. In 1948, Khrennikov attacked his seniors with orders from above. But in 1979, it was his juniors and it seemed more like an intergenerational conflict rather than an ideological one. According to Taruskin (2016), it was a small reflection of the gerontocracy that was common in the Soviet Union.

After 1979, following the turbulent period they lived through, Suslin, Gubaidulina, Smirnov and Denisov emigrated to pursue their careers, but in 1948 there was no such option. Shostakovich, Prokofiev and others had to stay and conform, sanctions from higher authorities forced the composers and even the administrators of the Union to remain silent and obedient.

Despite the fact that he was one of the highest authorities in both censorship incidents, there were people who praised and defended him for the reason that he struggled for the welfare of composers and that the composers did not get arrested during his tenure. Russian composer and pianist Rodion Shchedrin is one of those who thinks that Khrennikov was unfairly slandered by his colleagues. In a youtube video (MariinskyEn 2013), Shchedrin states that Khrennikov was a very tolerant man and the stories about enslaving genius composers and making them suffer are a tremendous lie. He also asserts that it is false that some people were terribly tortured. Moreover, he goes to extremes by reciting Boris Tishchenko's opinion in an agreeing manner: "the avant-garde composers should erect a monument to Khrennikov".

On the contrary, in *The Red Baton* documentary (Monsaingeon, 2004), Guennadi Rojdestvenski, Russian conductor who premiered Schnittke's *First Symphony*, states that he was an "eye-witness of the truly mad attacks Khrennikov launched against young and talented composers such as Schnittke, Denisov and Gubaidulina and a few others." Rojdestvenski claims that Khrennikov was shrewd and cautious that he would not leave any traces of his oppression. He explains that Schnittke's *First Symphony* was not allowed to be premiered in Moscow or Leningrad on the pretext that the hall was being renovated, it was the end of the season, the program was not scheduled, etc. As a conductor who knows Khrennikov personally, Rozdhestvensky asserts that "Talleyrand and Joseph Fouché were mere children compared to Tikhon Khrennikov."

In the same documentary, Khrennikov even seems to have contradicted himself over the years. For instance, he is seen making a speech at the USC meeting in 1962. He says: "The people and the Party are the soul of all music. By following these fundamental principles of socialist realist aesthetics, the multinational army of Soviet composers will achieve new heights! That's what the people expect of us, as well as our beloved Party." In the next scene, an interview with Khrennikov in 1994 is shown in which he states that he was never interested in politics and was busy with music. He claims that politics was none of his business and all his activity was devoted to helping his colleagues, not harming them.

As one of the most controversial figures in the history of Soviet music, Khrennikov kept his post as the leader of the Union of Soviet Composers during and after Stalin era. He kept up with the ever-changing politics after Stalin's death and held his authority under the succession of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although he tried to keep up with the time and there were people who praised him, his name had always been cursed among young composers and the condemnation he received was far greater since he caused many prominent composers' career to come to a halt.

## References

- Bittner, Stephen V. 2008. *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.
- Bowlit, E. John. 1976. *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism 1902-1934*. New York: Viking Press.
- Darby, E. Joseph, 1999. "Dmitri Shostakovich's second, third and fourth symphonies: Problems of context, analysis, and interpretation." *Unpublished PhD Thesis*. City University of New York.
- Eichler, Jeremy. 2007. "The Denouncer: A Meeting with Stalin's Music Man, Who Outlived Them All.," *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved March 10, 2018, <[http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2007/09/02/the\\_denouncer/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/ae/music/articles/2007/09/02/the_denouncer/?page=full)>
- Fairclough, Pauline. 2006. *A Soviet Credo: Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony*. Vermont: Ashgate Publishing.
- Fay, Laurel E. 2005. *Shostakovich: A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Frolova-Walker, Marina and Jonathan Walker. 2012. *Music and Soviet Power, 1917-1932*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.
- Hakobian, Levon. 2017. *Music of the Soviet era: 1917-1991*. (2nd edn.). London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Heller, Lenoid. 1997. "A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories." Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, ed., *Socialist Realism Without Shores*. pp. 51-75. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jaffé, Daniel. 2012. *Historical Dictionary of Russian Music*. London: Scarecrow Press.
- Jones, Derek. Ed. 2015. *Censorship: A world encyclopedia*. New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Kurtz, Michael and Brown, Malcolm. (2007). *Sofia Gubaidulina: A biography*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- MacDonald, Ian. 1990. *The New Shostakovich*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Maes, Francis. 2002. *A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MariinskyEn. (2013, June 27). *Rodion Shchedrin about Tikhon Khrennikov...* [Video file]. Retrieved July 10, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KjTYZF0CaY>
- Monsaigneon, Bruno (Director) and Idéale Audience, IMG Artists, Arte France (Producers). (2004). *The Red Baton – Scenes from Musical Life in Stalinist Russia-With Guennadi Rojdestvenski* [Video file]. Retrieved July 10, 2018, <https://www.medi.tv/en/documentaries/the-red-baton/>
- Morrison, Simon. 2009. *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*. Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Morrison, Simon and Nelly Kravetz. 2006. "The Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of October, or How the Specter of Communism Haunted Prokofiev." *The Journal of Musicology*, 23(2), pp. 227-262.
- Ross, Alex. 2007. *The Rest is Noise*. New York: Pan Books Limited.
- Rubsamen, Walter H. 1951. "Musical Uproar in Moscow by Alexander Werth." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. 4(3) pp. 268-72.
- Schmelz, Peter J. 2009. *Such freedom, if only musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Schnittke, Alfred and Ivashkin, Alexander. 2002. *A Schnittke Reader*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Retrieved July 8, 2018, from Project MUSE database.
- Schonberg, Harold C. 2013. *Büyük Besteciler* (1st edn). Ahmet Fethi Yıldırım, trans. İstanbul, Doğan Egmont Yayıncılık.
- Schwarz, Boris. 1976. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: 1917-1970*. London: Barrie and Jenkins Ltd.
- Seroff, Victor Ilyich. 1970. *Dimitri Shostakovich: The Life and Background of a Soviet Composer*. New York: Books for Libraries Press.
- Service, Tom. (2013, April 29). *A Guide to the Music of Alfred Schnittke* [Web log post]. Retrieved on June 10, 2018, from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2013/apr/29/alfred-schnittke-contemporary-music-tom-service>
- Slonimsky, Nicolas. Ed. 1994. *Music since 1900*. New York: Schirmer Books.
- Slonimsky, Nicolas. 1944. "Soviet Music and Musicians" *The Slavonic and East European Review*. American Series, 3(4), pp. 1-18.
- Slonimsky, Nicolas. 2004. *Writings on Music, Vol. 2, Soviet Music and Composers*. Ed. Electra Slonimsky Yourke. London: Routledge.
- Smrž, Jiří. 2011. *Symphonic Stalinism: Claiming Russian Musical Classics for the New Soviet Listener, 1932-1953*. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Taruskin, Richard. 2016. *Russian Music at Home and Abroad: New Essays*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Tassie, Gregor. 2014. *Nikolay Myaskovsky: The Conscience of Russian Music*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Tompkins, David, G. 2013. *Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Early Cold War Poland and East Germany*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press.
- Viljanen, Elina. 2005. *Boris Asaf'ev and the Soviet Musicology. Unpublished Master's Thesis*: University of Helsinki.
- Volkov, Solomon. 2004. *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*. New York: Limelight Editions.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. 1994. *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yabukov, Manashir. 1995. "The Golden Age: the true story of the Premiere." David Fanning, eds., *Shostakovich Studies*. pp. 189-204. New York: Cambridge University Press.