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The Modernist Trend in Soviet Russian Music Between the Wars: An Isolated Episode or a Part of Big Current?

Modernizmo tendencija Sovietų Rusijos tarpukario muzikoje: pavienis epizodas ar didesnės srovės dalis?

Abstract
For a long time the modernist music created in the Soviet Union during the 1920s was not treated in the international scholarship as something truly valuable. Although in the early 1980s the attitudes began to change, an opinion is still in force that "the Russian musical avant-garde [of the early 20th century] is notable not so much for its achievements in professional musical composition, as for the intensity and conceptual boldness of its aspirations" (Andreas Wehrmeyer). This, indeed, may be the case with some minor figures that were active around 1917, but it would be unfair to underestimate the scope and importance of the innovatory trend in Russian (now already Soviet) music of the 1920s, whose influence was felt well into the 1930s. The trend in question was an integral part of both the international modernism of that time and the modernist movements in Russian literature, theatre, and visual arts (which for some time seemed to be compatible with the Communist ideology). Its production, apart from works by Nikolai Roslavetz, Vladimir Deshevov, Leonid Polovinkin, Alexander Mosolov and some other composers, includes at least several large-scale masterpieces, stylistically gravitating towards the extremes of the international avant-garde: Dmitri Shostakovich's *The Nose* and *To October*, Gavriil Popov's First Symphony, Sergei Prokofiev's *Cantata to the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*. The interwar Russian "modernism" deserves to be assessed as an artistically valuable phenomenon integrated into the "big" history of Russian and international art, rather than as a collection of curiosities of local importance.
Keywords: modernism, Soviet music, ASM (*Assotziatziya sovremennoy muzyki*), Vladimir Deshevov, Alexander Mosolov, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, *The Nose*, *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution.*

Anotacija
Trečio dešimtmečio Sovietų Sąjungoje sukurta modernistinė muzika ilgą laiką pasaulyje buvo suvokiama kaip nelabai vertinga. Toks požiūris galbūt ir tinka kelioms ne itin svarbioms muzikos pasaulio figūroms, kurios veikė apie 1917 m., tačiau būtų neteisinga nuvertinti Rusijos (tuo metu jau Sovietų) inovatyvių srovių svarbą, kuri buvo stipriai juntama trečiame dešimtmetyje ir paveikė ketvirto dešimtmečio kryptis. Tendencija, apie kurią kalbama šiame straipsnyje, buvo svarbi to laikotarpio tarptautinio modernizmo dalis ir modernizmo judėjimų Rusijos literatūroje, teatre, vaizduojamuose menuose detalė. Išskyrus Nikolajaus Roslaveco, Vladimiro Deševovo, Leonido Polovinkino, Aleksandro Mosolovo ir kai kurių kitų kompozitorių darbus, tuo laikotarpiu buvo sukurti bent keli grandioziniai šedevrai, kurių stilistika drąsiai lygiavosi į ekstremalų tarptautinį avangardą – tai Dmitrijaus Šostakovičiaus „Nosis" ir Simfonija Nr. 2 „Spaliui", Gavrilo Popovo Simfonija Nr. 1, Sergejaus Prokofjevo „Kantata Spalio revoliucijos dvidešimtosioms metinėms".
Reikšminiai žodžiai: modernizmas, sovietinė muzika, Šiuolaikinės muzikos asociacija, Vladimiras Deševovas, Aleksandras Mosolovas, Sergejus Prokofjevas, Dmitrijus Šostakovičius, opera „Nosis", „Kantata Spalio revoliucijos dvidešimtosioms metinėms".

Introduction

For quite a long time the modernistic music created in the Soviet Union during the 1920s was not treated in the international scholarship as something truly valuable. For Boris Schwarz, the leading Cold War authority in the field of Soviet music, the modernistic Russian Soviet composers of the 1920s were merely copying "external devices [and] modernistic tricks" (Schwarz 1983: 63) imported from the West in the years preceding the "Great Turning Point" (*Velikiy perelom*) of 1929/30. Though in the early 1980s the attitudes began to change due to some important musicological efforts[1] and belated premiere recordings, an opinion is still in force that:

> ... the Russian musical avant-garde [of the early 20th century] is notable not so much for its achievements in professional musical composition, as for the intensity and conceptual boldness of its aspirations. (Wehrmeyer 2013: 227)

This, indeed, may be the case with some rather minor figures active around 1917, such as the future émigrés Nikolay Obukhov (Obouhow) and Ivan Vyshnegradsky (Wyschnegradsky), as well as amateur composer Mikhail Matyushin and theorist Nikolai Kulbin, but it would be unfair to underestimate the scope and importance of the innovatory trend in Russian (now already Soviet) music of the 1920s, whose influence was felt well into the 1930s.

The October Revolution of 1917 put an end to the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture and led

to mass emigration among those who were involved in this wonderful, frenzied flourishing of arts, letters and humanities. Artists, for the most part, showed no willingness to collaborate with the aggressive and adventurist new regime. At the same time, some important personalities of the avant-garde, leftist orientation preserved certain illusions about the revolutionary intentions of Bolsheviks not only in politics, but also in culture. During the early Soviet years, such view was supported by the Bolshevik "ministry of culture" – the People's Commissariat of Education (*Narodny komissariat prosveshcheniya*, Narkompros) – under the relatively enlightened guidance of Anatoliy Lunacharsky. A passionate admirer of music, especially of Beethoven and Scriabin, he believed revolution and music to be "sisters" and, consequently, was inclined to support first of all those artistic movements, whose ideology was based on the utopian belief in the transfiguring power of art. The representatives of such movements – in Russia of those times, they were often referred to in a generalizing manner as futurists – were appointed directors of the Narkompros structures responsible for different arts. Theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, painter David Shterenberg and, more unexpectedly, young composer Artur Lourié, known for his interest in quarter-tones and an extravagant (quasi-cubistic) appearance of some of his scores, became heads of the departments of theatre, visual arts and music, respectively. Lourié initiated a large-scale reform of concert life and musical education, including the organization of musical events for large audiences and the restructuring of concert and opera repertoire in accordance with the new regime's ideological attitudes, but his measures were met with strong opposition from most musicians and ultimately failed; in 1921, he resigned his post and emigrated the next year. His main contribution to Soviet music as a composer was *Our March* for collective declamation and winds, set to the words by the greatest "futurist" poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (1918): a strange piece in triple time, rather unfit to serve as an accompaniment to marching proletarian masses.

Opposing the policy of gradual transformations, supported by Lunacharsky, was the more radical tendency to reject the pre-revolutionary, bourgeois forms of culture and art and to replace them with new, proletarian ones. The new-born mythology of the victorious class, building an entirely new world on the ruins of the repudiated past, implied an appropriate theoretical and practical background for artistic and literary creations. In order to elaborate such a background, a special organization named Proletkult (*Proletarskaya kul'tura* – Proletarian Culture) was founded as early as September 1917, shortly before the Bolshevik *coup d'état*. "In the name of our tomorrow, burn Raphael to ashes, destroy museums, trample down the flowers of art": these verses by the proletarian poet Vladimir Kirillov, allegedly inscribed on the façade of Proletkult's office, are indicative of the organization's principles.

Such an ideological attitude, indeed, can be described as an avant-garde *sui generis*, but in terms of musical style the production of Proletkult, not surprisingly, was utterly simplistic: its leading composers were busy writing songs to poster-like propagandistic verses intended to be sung by large masses of lay people. The extreme left wing of Proletkult was represented by Arseniy Avraamov (1886–1944), who has remained in the history as one of Russian pioneers of quarter-tone music and, more importantly, as the creator of the idea of *Symphony of Sirens* (*Simfoniya gudkov*) – a truly proletarian work, whose sound material had to be provided principally by sounds of industrial provenance. In the early post-revolutionary years, the project of *Symphony of Sirens*, rehashing some ideas of Italian futurists and anticipating the future *musique concrète*, was realized in some major cities (Nizhniy Novgorod, Baku). Judging by its description (Avraamov 1923),[2] the *Symphony* – intended to be a grandiose accompaniment to holiday celebrations – included, apart from noises, some quotations from revolutionary anthems (*Internationale*, *Marseillaise*). The work was executed by appropriately tuned factory whistles, car and ship horns, cannons, guns and other similar devices.

The avant-garde of this kind was rather crude and in any case had no chance of drawing an international response in the early 1920s. In regard to the more sophisticated genres, the music of the early Soviet years had nothing really avant-garde to offer to the outside world. And for understandable reasons – disorganization of cultural life, emigration of many major musicians (including the "top three": Stravinsky, Rachmaninov and Prokofiev), all kinds of restrictions put on those who had remained – the scope of styles and forms cultivated among serious composers during the early post-revolutionary years was considerably limited. The composers' productivity in the genres of opera, cantata, oratorio, concerto and symphony diminished almost to zero. Curiously enough, the most advanced line in Soviet music of the early 1920s was represented by the characteristic post-romantic idiom strongly marked with the influence of Scriabin. Though the latter's art was regarded by many – including Lunacharsky – as an optimistic prophecy of the revolution, the production of his early Soviet followers was utterly alien to the heroic revolutionary pathos so characteristic of a good deal of poetry, prose and visual arts of the same period. The refined piano and chamber music reminiscent of Scriabin of his middle and late periods (and, by extension, of Rachmaninov, Grieg, and Chopin), was the most conspicuous part of the Silver Age heritage in the new-born musical culture of the Soviet state. The leading representatives of this post-Scriabin line were Nikolay Roslavetz (1881–1944) and Samuil Feynberg (1890–1962).

Roslavetz owes his reputation especially to the idea of unifying melody and harmony under the common principle of sound organization, similar to the mystic chord engendering all the vertical and horizontal pitch correlations in Scriabin's *Prometheus* (1909–10).[3] In Roslavetz's compositions written during his most productive period from the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s (including piano sonatas, piano pieces, string quartets, piano trios, violin, cello and viola sonatas, pieces for string instruments with piano, and the Violin Concerto of 1925, crowning his whole oeuvre), the function of such unifying principle is performed by pitch complexes termed synthetic chords. In vertical projections, they are usually arranged by major and minor thirds, with a "romantic seventh or ninth chord as their kernel and some additional tones that enrich it" (Gojowy 2006: 179) without altering the essentially late romantic (somewhat Scriabinian) colour of the harmony. The synthetic chord technique imparts to music a rather uncertain and monotonous flavour of tonality, which, due to incessant ellipses, has lost much of the sense of purpose and is floating, somewhat passively, within the same scope of richly sounding harmonic structures. Feynberg, now remembered mainly as a pianist, was in the early 1920s one of the most high-profile composers of his generation, his best known work being the one-movement Sixth Piano Sonata in B minor (1922). The latter's source of inspiration was Oswald Spengler's eschatological treatise *The Decline of the West* (1918), then enormously popular among pessimistically disposed intellectuals. The work is preceded by an epigraph from Spengler, in which the chimes sounding from countless towers of Western Europe are described as the most eloquent symbols of passing time, heralding the imminent end of the epoch. The idea of these chimes is reproduced in the Sonata's leitmotif: a succession of natural and augmented fourths, creating a harmonic atmosphere suggestive of Scriabin's *Prometheus* and late piano sonatas. Belonging to the same post-Scriabin world are Feynberg's other three piano sonatas of the decade between 1918 and 1928. According to one of Feynberg's contemporaries:

> [This] grotesque and nightmarish world is the exact reflection of our era of wars and revolutions [...] in the unhealthy and delicate psyche of a great artist. (Sabaneyev 1926: 135)

Scriabin's favourite model of one-movement piano sonata, with characteristically Scriabinian alternations of impulsive élan and self-absorbed musings, richly chromatic (in places quartal) harmonies and prevalently dense textures, was echoed in the Third Sonata in C minor by Nikolay Myaskovsky (1881–1950) – a composer who had essentially very little in common with Scriabin both stylistically and ideologically. This shift towards a loosely Scriabinesque expressivity, dating from 1920, was very unusual for Myaskovsky, who was ultimately dissatisfied with the piece and, surely like many of his colleagues, experienced an acute feeling of uncertainty in regards to the further development of his own work and of his country's music in general. Significant is the following passage from Myaskovsky's letter to his close friend Prokofiev (who had happily escaped abroad) of 23 December 1923:

> ... I have to confess that now I feel absolutely untalented – I have lost the ground under my feet. I cannot keep composing with an [earlier] ideology, that is, strictly speaking, thoughtlessly, because all this early humdrum is now needless. And it is difficult to compose as is needed here, since you have to simplify yourself to a paradisiac state – but I have already moved away from such a cloudlessness and unclothedness [*beskostyumnost*]. In short, I've fallen between two stools and, of course, I'm in a state of absolute sterility. (Prokofiev and Myaskovsky 1977: 179–180)[4]

After 1924

The things began to change around 1924, when the *crème de la crème* of composers, both modernist and traditionalist, who had remained in the country, formed the Association of Contemporary Music (*Assotziatziya sovremennoy muzyki*, ASM) – an ideologically free and organizationally rather loose society of professional musicians, whose emergence became possible due to a certain normalization of the country's cultural life during the early years of the so-called New Economic Policy. To circumscribe the scope of creative liberty for a Soviet artist, the Party's number two, Lev Trotsky, launched the term *poputchik(i)* (literally: fellow-traveller[s]). The label *poputchik*, in principle, could be attached to any person of arts and letters who, without being a member of the Party or fully devoted Communist, showed sympathy with the Revolution and was hostile to its enemies. Until the second half of the 1920s (when Trotsky lost his influence), the ideological services of the regime remained tolerant towards the *poputchiki* and even encouraged a certain pluralism. ASM was a typical gathering of *poputchiki*, opposed to the line represented by proletarian dogmatists. Needless to say, in due course the latter group succeeded in overwhelming their *poputchiki* opponents; for some time, however, ASM functioned more or less freely and in 1924/25, when the Soviet Union, finally, established diplomatic and cultural relations with most European democracies, could get in contact with the International Society of Contemporary Music (ISCM) and the Viennese publishing house *Universal Edition* (UE). As a result, the works of the Association's leading members, including Myaskovsky, Roslavetz and Feynberg, as well as Vladimir Deshevov (1889–1955), Vladimir Shcherbachëv (1889–1952), Leonid Polovinkin (1894–1949), Lev Knipper

(1898–1974), Alexander Mosolov (1900–1973), Vissarion Shebalin (1902–1963), Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904–1987), Gavriil Popov (1904–1972), and Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975), were regularly published by UE from 1925 onwards[5] and appeared in the programmes of the ISCM festivals. The Western publishers and impresarios clearly expected that the musicians from the country of the victorious revolution would provide them with works of revolutionary, avant-garde kind. This, perhaps, had a stimulating influence upon Soviet composers of younger generations – more so because at that time the authorities did not put major obstacles in their way.

According to the émigré critic (formerly an ASM activist) Leonid Sabaneyev, around the mid-1920s:

> ... everything "Soviet", one way or another, entered [in the West] the sphere of some snobbish interest. (Sabaneyev 2004: 206, first published 1937)

However, the first major piece of music based on a specifically Soviet subject matter was composed in Paris rather than in the USSR. The work in question was Sergei Prokofiev's ballet *The Steel Step* (*Le pas d'acier*) written at Sergei Dyagilev's (Serge Diaghilev's) behest in 1925 and first performed in 1927 at *Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt*. The ballet, dealing with the fashionable topic of the struggle between "old" and "new" in Soviet Russia, reflects an utmost primitive vision of the Soviet realities. The image of life transformed in the spirit of proletarian revolution is represented by harsh harmonies, insistently reiterated motifs, monotonous *forte* and distinctly accented rhythmic *ostinati* imitating the work of factory mechanisms. Obviously, Dyagilev reckoned upon the work's sensational success, but his expectations were not realized in full, and the ballet left the stage shortly after the première. Anyway, the piano score was duly published by UE and advertised as an essentially "Soviet" work. The echoes of the factory scene from *The Steel Step* are heard in the urbanistic works by Mosolov (*The Factory*, known also as *Iron Foundry*, 1927, originally conceived as an introduction to the ballet *Steel*, the rest of which was either lost afterwards or not written down at all) and Deshevov (the opera *Ice and Steel*, 1930, also containing a scene with machines in work). The same composers provided some other stuff of similar kind that gained certain repute outside the USSR. During his Soviet trip of 1926, Darius Milhaud was impressed by the music of Deshevov (to be more exact, by his early, rather crude pieces, partly on "industrial" themes) and declared him the Soviet Russia's most interesting composer, a "real genius",[6] while Mosolov's three to four minutes' long *The Factory* became an international symphonic hit. Lasting some three and a half minutes, the piece fully deserves the characteristic given once to one of its elder "cousins", Honegger's *Pacific 231*:[7] the very idea of this music manifests not merely in the representation of a working mechanism, but rather in moulding a mythological symbol in the cultural and historical context of the epoch (Tarasti 1978: 27). Perhaps the same could be said about the factory scene from Deshevov's opera.

Neither Deshevov, nor Mosolov were musical urbanists *par excellence*. In the best of their oeuvre both were bold and inventive modernists; industrial passages represent but one minor facet of their art. Deshevov's opera, treating of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921, comprises several episodes of really good theatre and testifies to the composer's gift for whimsical musical illustration; characteristically, the boldest, most modernist musical devices are used to depict the disorganized crowd and counter-revolutionary element (tortuous, essentially atonal horizontal lines, sharply dissonant harmonies, grotesquely distorted motifs). Mosolov's early output includes four piano sonatas (Nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5, 1924–25), the first of which was acclaimed by Roslavetz as:

> ... a true Bible of modernism, where one finds the accumulation of all the harmonic tricks in the spirit of the most audacious angry "hits" by Prokofiev, Stravinsky and the Western masters of polytonality. (Roslavetz 1927: 15)

Judging by the body of the sonatas, as well as by Mosolov's other extant works of the mid-1920s – including *Three Children's Scenes* and *Four Newspaper Advertisements* for voice and piano, two Nocturnes and *Turkmenian Nights* for piano, a one-act opera, a piano concerto, and a string quartet, all written in 1926–28 – his version of modernism, in contrast to Roslavetz's, was of a non-systematic, rather elemental type. Its idiosyncratic features include frequent changes of tempo and dynamics, abundant use of extreme registers, a penchant for emphatically square, "chopped" rhythms (a common device is grouping of bars in pairs) and for massive dissonant chords, often including the interval of diminished octave and / or augmented triad; chords of pure and augmented fourths, as well as tone clusters, are also quite common. At the same time, he did not avoid more familiar harmonic structures and simple diatonic tunes; though the element of extravagant rudeness is predominant, there are "islands" of multi-layered quasi-impressionistic texture, implying a copious pedal.

These and other Russian Soviet composers with modernist inclinations – such as Polovinkin, Knipper (whose *magnum opus* was the opera *The Northern Wind*, staged in 1930 and still awaiting its revival in a major international venue), Popov and lesser known Dmitriy Melkikh (1885–1943), Sergei Protopopov (1893–1954), Aleksandr Dzegelenok (1891–1969), Aleksei Zhivotov (1904–1964) – could flourish and enjoy a relative stylistic liberty in the atmosphere of intense cosmopolitan musical life brought about largely thanks to the activities of

ASM. Due to the connections between ASM and ISCM, which were in force until the notorious Great Turning Point of 1929/30, the leading musical centres of the USSR were visited by such noted composers as Franz Schreker (who conducted the Leningrad production of *Der ferne Klang*, 1925), Darius Milhaud (1926), Alfredo Casella (1926), Prokofiev (1927), Alban Berg (who assisted at the Leningrad staging of *Wozzeck*, 1927), Paul Hindemith (1927 and 1928/29), Arthur Honegger (1928), Henry Cowell (1929) and Béla Bartók (1929). Such was the cultural environment that nourished the art of the youngest among the early Soviet modernists, who succeeded in overshadowing all his colleagues by the verve, diversity and originality of his oeuvre. The question is, of course, of Shostakovich, who in his youth – before becoming the "tragic hero" of the twentieth-century music and the chronicler of his homeland's misfortunes – was, perhaps, one of the most extreme avant-gardists on an international scale.

Modernism and Shostakovich's symphonies *To October* and *First of May*

As was noted above, the cultural policy of early Soviet years was, in general, tolerant towards innovative artistic movements. Accordingly, "extreme" means of musical utterance could seem compatible with Bolshevik ideology. Shostakovich's earliest offerings to it were two 20–30-minute long one-movement symphonies dedicated to the chief Soviet holidays: the Second, *To October* (1927), and the Third, *First of May* (1929). Both works have traditionally been considered Shostakovich's failures; in the evening of his life, the composer himself declared them to be the only obvious flops among his fifteen symphonies (Shostakovich and Glikman 2001: 315). In each of them, the main (purely orchestral) part is followed by a much shorter choral apotheosis carrying appropriate propagandistic message. No wonder that musically the choral conclusions of both symphonies are rather simplistic. On the other hand, their instrumental sections deserve a serious appreciation.

In each symphony, the character and the organization of thematic material are conditioned by the nature of respective festive occasions. The event behind the October holiday was regarded as a birth of the new happy world as a result of the uncompromising struggle with the evil forces; accordingly, the choral glorification of Lenin and the October Revolution in the Second Symphony is preceded by a sequence of orchestral fragments illustrating the progress from "the chaos of the gloomy past, through the awakening of protest, the ripening of revolutionary consciousness" (Sabinina 1976: 59), and the elegy over the fallen. For each of these topoi, Shostakovich succeeded in finding fresh expressive devices. The initial *Largo* episode, which depicts the "chaos", is based on ascending and descending progressions of uncertain tonal profile played by string instruments at different speeds, the unit of movement varying from a fourth note in double-basses to a sixteenth in triplet in first violins. The very idea of such a quasi-aleatoric polyrhythm anticipates some discoveries of younger generations of avant-garde, up to Ligeti's micropolyphony and Penderecki's sonoristics (Gojowy 1983: 43). The next episode ("the awakening of protest") is a grotesque march. Especially curious is the third episode ("the ripening of revolutionary consciousness"), where thirteen woodwind and string parts, each entering the play with its own subject, form a dense sound magma anticipating the famous *Épode* for 18 solo strings from Messiaen's *Chronochromie* (1960) – an extravagant piece of music, imitating a disorderly hubbub of many birds. To this passage, one might apply Messiaen's auto-commentary concerning *Épode*:

> There is no pair of similar counterpoints or rhythms, no harmonic control here; if a musician is thrown out of time, he cannot correct himself, since he hears around him nothing but a disorderly hubbub. (Samuel 1967: 155)

The more profound aspect of Shostakovich's personality reveals itself in the slow interlude between the climax of the hubbub and the choral apotheosis. Shostakovich unofficially titled this excerpt "death of a child".[8] It unfolds as an endless melody, whose most significant moments are the entries of a figure consisting of two identical descending minor seconds in trochaic rhythm. The figure's obvious historical prototype is the lament of Yurodivy from Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Henceforth, this lament motif will become an important leitmotif of Shostakovich's oeuvre as a whole, recurring in different guises in most of his orchestral and chamber works (and adding a minor tint even to such ostentatiously major pages as the climaxes of the finales of his Fifth and Ninth Symphonies).[9] The choral conclusion of *To October*, preceded by a factory whistle (an emblem of the victorious class), is intended to symbolize a kind of transfiguration or epiphany; in the last pages of the score, the texture of the work's beginning is recapitulated in an ordered form, as a sequence of ascending and descending B major scales played by all instruments in a common tempo.

As for the *First of May*, its programme does not suppose strong contrasts and dramatic complications. The composer's task was to express the Dionysian, somewhat disorderly spirit of a joyful popular holiday. The symphony's instrumental part has the character of a mosaic made of variegated short segments, most of which are pastoral-like, dance-like, march-like or scherzo-like, sometimes with a certain folk-orientated flavour. The connections, for the

most part, are loose; reiterations are avoided. The basic formal idea – to do without repetitions of thematic elements (such was Shostakovich's own formulation reproduced in the memoirs of his friend[10]) – is, indeed, unprecedented for the symphonic genre. On the other hand, in terms of harmonic language, the *First of May* is by far less radical than *To October*. The symphony's peculiar sound is defined by the dualism of E flat major and C major: the scales and triads of these two keys alternate or are superimposed over and over again. The final chorus, as in *To October* is preceded by a relatively slow episode that introduces an important contrast with the rest of the work: a somewhat theatricalised exchange of cues between the brass and the strings playing in unison – a very distant echo of the instrumental responsory before the *Ode to Joy* in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The symphony's weak points, apart from the shallow ending, include a certain abuse of two-part texture and of monotonously bouncy rhythms – both shortcomings being not alien also to Shostakovich's later music. Be that as it may, neither the Third Symphony, nor *To October* deserves to be qualified as failure. On the contrary, both works testify to their author's great inventiveness, self-reliance and aesthetic non-conformism.

Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*

Other facets of young Shostakovich's aesthetic non-conformism appear in his piano works of the same epoch, the First Sonata of 1926 and the cycle of ten *Aphorisms* of 1927, in which he shows his flair for strange harmonies, shocking effects and biting humour. But it is, arguably, his three-act opera *The Nose* that will remain in the history as an absolute summit of the whole decade. The work is based on Nikolay Gogol's *Petersburg Tale* of the same name – a bizarre narrative about a middle-rank functionary Platon Kovalëv, whose nose, after having left its master's physiognomy, turns into a functionary of a higher rank, who is then caught by the police and finally returned to its rightful owner. The opera was composed in 1927–28, first staged in Leningrad in 1930, taken off in 1931 and revived in the Soviet Union only in 1974. Here it would be out of place to discuss the opera's conceptual aspects, including its relation to the *genius loci* of St. Petersburg as reflected in Gogol's prose and later developed in the oeuvre of the writers from the literary group OBERIU, who belonged to the same generation as Shostakovich, had a similar cultural background and knew him personally (these topics are discussed in my earlier publications[11]). Instead, let me point to some features of the opera's music that make *The Nose* one of the most audacious works in the whole history of opera.

The score involves chamber orchestra (with one wind instrument per part and several additional instruments) and some seventy characters, of which only ten or so have relatively important singing parts. At first sight, the opera produces the impression of an unbridled youthful fantasy. The listener's ears are struck by squeals and roars of instruments and human voices in extreme registers, singing with clutched nose and imitations of yawn and snoring, sudden jumps from plain triadic tonality to the most radical atonality and vice versa, fragments of deliberately tangled quasi-aleatoric texture, quotations and stylizations saturated with false notes occurring in the most inappropriate contexts, and so on. For the first time in the history of music, Shostakovich introduces into the chamber orchestra peasant Russian plucked string instruments – two balalaikas and four domras. Another, more significant innovation, consists in scoring a whole five-minute-long excerpt – one of the entr'actes in the first act – for an ensemble of percussion instruments without definite pitch and, moreover, in moulding it as a canon whose themes, naturally, are of a purely rhythmic nature (it is worth noting that Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation*, commonly regarded as the earliest work for percussion only, was completed in 1931, that is three or four years later). The work's demonstrative stylistic heterogeneity anticipates the so-called polystilistics – a characteristic trend of the past century's last decades. Innovatory is also the cinematographic device of presenting events, occurring in different places and at different moments of time, in a kind of simultaneous counterpoint: in the third act, while Podtochina (Kovalev's acquaintance) and her daughter are reading a letter from Kovalev, he and his friend are reading her answer. A similar effect of synchronization of events happening at different times will be re-discovered in the mid-1960s by Bernd Alois Zimmermann and used in his opera *Die Soldaten* (Gojowy 1983: 48).

It seems that the composer's intention was to demonstrate that everything in the opera is possible at any moment. And yet this is not a mere anarchy for the sake of anarchy or extravagance for the sake of extravagance; behind all this lies a really serious metaphysical background. Shostakovich's youthful opera can be read as a study of music in decline, of culture in decadence, of world in the state of disintegration. In such an absurd and cacophonous universe, order is reduced to mechanical regularity, while the reigning force in human relations is the dominance of the strong over the weak – in this respect Shostakovich (not unlike his contemporaries from OBERIU) anticipates Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" (*théâtre de la cruauté*), whose principles were formulated in 1938.

Thus, Shostakovich's *The Nose* is not merely an eccentric humoresque or satire, but something more complex and many-sided. It has preserved and developed Gogol's whimsical uncertainty, so eloquently described by another great native of St. Petersburg (Nabokov 1961: 142):

> ... here and there in the most innocent descriptive passage, this or that word, sometimes a mere adverb or a preposition, [...] is inserted in such a way as to make the harmless sentence explode in a wild display of nightmare fireworks; or else the passage that had started in a rambling colloquial manner all of a sudden leaves the tracks and swerves into the irrational [...]; or again, quite as suddenly, a door bursts open and mighty wave of foaming poetry rushes in only to dissolve in bathos, or to turn into its own parody, or to be checked by the sentence breaking and reverting to a conjuror's patter. [...] It gives one the sensation of something ludicrous and at the same time stellar, lurking constantly around the corner – and one likes to recall that the difference between the comic side of things, and their cosmic side, depends upon one sibilant.

And Shostakovich's youthful opera is just like this: an enigmatic composition reflecting both the comic (and, by extension, also the strange, absurd, eerie) and the cosmic side of things; a uniquely concentrated cocktail of the nightmarish, the irrational, the ludicrous and the stellar. Historically, it anticipated much of the non-conformist Soviet music of the 1960–80s, for which contrasting the modernist or avant-garde devices, associated rather with the world of the nightmares, the irrational and the ludicrous, with more time-honoured modes of utterance, pointing to the sphere of the stellar, was a kind of *idée fixe*. *The Nose*, indeed, is a prophetic work in many respects, and it seems almost certain that if its author could continue in the same vein, many audacious discoveries in the field of contemporary musical and theatrical language would have entered current usage earlier than they actually did.

Traces of bizarre humour and grotesque betraying the hand of the author of *The Nose* are found in Shostakovich's early three-act ballets, *The Golden Age* (1930) and *The Bolt* (1931). Their scenarios, dealing with anti-Soviet and anti-worker conspiracies (in an unnamed Western country visited by a Soviet football team and in a Soviet factory, respectively), are standard specimens of clichéd Soviet propaganda. The "positive", authentically Soviet element in both ballets is expressed mainly through vigorous non-syncopated square rhythms, simple diatonic lines, dense synthetic orchestration, while the suspicious and hostile element is usually marked by more or less strange rhythmic, harmonic, melodic outlines and by a rather sparse orchestration, with abundant use of extreme registers and unusual instrumental combinations. No wonder that in *The Golden Age* the images of the Western "evil" – such as the sensual *Adagio* danced by the *femme fatale* trying to seduce the Soviet sportsmen or the witty *Polka*, intended to be a choreographic satire on the League of Nations – turned out much more lively than those of the native "good". In *The Bolt*, too, the most interesting pages are related to wreckers, bureaucrats and other "bad guys". The pantomime with the participation of one of them, out of the context of the ballet, has become one of Shostakovich's most charming hits, universally known as *Waltz-Scherzo*: its piano transcription was included in the collection of Shostakovich's piano pieces for children *Dances of the Dolls*, first published in 1952.

The ostentatiously extravagant, cheerful, youthful, experimental, sportive line in Shostakovich's oeuvre came to an end in the early 1930s not only because the composer had grown older and more mature, but also because of the crucial shift in the Soviet history. As the regime was hardening, the prevalent forms of agitation on its behalf were being changed. The elements of a certain revolutionary anarchism, acceptable and even encouraged during the 1920s, gave way to the consolidated "grand Soviet style". The inertia of youthful zest, felt in Shostakovich's next works for theatre, *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* and *The Limpid Stream* (largely based on the material from *The Bolt*), cost him dear, for they could not be tolerated any more. As a result, he had to give up stylistic extravagances, adopt an ostensibly moderate idiom and squander his talent on regular sacrifices to the Moloch of the dead dogma, which had come to replace the last viable remnants of the early Communist mythology. Nothing of this, however, was in vain. The Russian music lost its most prominent champion of modernism, acquiring in its stead a great tragic and symbolic figure.

Modernism and Gavriil Popov

In regard to most other *poputchiki* composers of more or less modernist orientation, their situation became really deplorable; some of the most promising and inventive ones virtually ceased to produce anything departing from the commonplace. One of those who managed to keep a relatively high profile for some time after 1930 was Gavriil Popov – a composer from Leningrad, two years older than Shostakovich. As early as 1927, he became known not only in Russia, but also abroad due to his Septet (later renamed Chamber Symphony) for flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, violin, cello and double-bass. The four-movement work is a perfect example of the kind of tonal writing that dominated in the 1920s: pointedly "un-romantic", rhythmically crisp, spiced with sharp dissonances in the manner of Hindemith's *Chamber Musics*, Prokofiev's Quintet and Stravinsky's early neoclassical scores. In 1929, he started working on a symphony for large orchestra – his First – and completed it in 1932. The symphony's definitive version was premièred by the Leningrad Philharmonic under Fritz Stiedry on 22 March 1935, and the next day the Leningrad branch of Repertkom – the State institution charged with the selection of repertoire for theatres and concert halls – released a formal interdiction on its

performances (Popov 1986: 260; Romashchuk 2000: 44). Thus, Popov's First Symphony became the very first Soviet musical work that was formally prohibited by State authorities. Notwithstanding the intercessions of Prokofiev, who sympathized with Popov and was making attempts to organize his symphony's performance in Paris (Popov 1986: 76–78), as well as of such influential figures as Asafyev, Shebalin and Shaporin, the ban remained in force, and the work's revival took place only in 1989.[12]

Popov's First Symphony is in three movements and lasts for some forty minutes. Its twenty-minute-long first movement (*Allegro energico*) seems to be a direct precedent to the gigantic opening movement of Shostakovich's Fourth (1935–36). In both cases, the whole is built up out of variegated sections tied together in the frames of an enormously inflated, richly polyphonized sonata scheme; in both cases, the prevailing mood is highly strained, the music moves impulsively from one overwhelming climax to another. Since Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, this was the first instance in Russian symphonic music of such an impressive combination of fauvistic extravagance with unusually rich and detailed instrumental texture, sophisticated polyphony and inventive rhythm. Against its background, even the *Scythian Suite* and the first movement of the Second Symphony by Prokofiev seem rather traditional and uncomplicated. The second movement (*Largo con moto e molto cantabile*), based on a somewhat capricious "endless melody", first played by oboe, then carried on by other instruments producing a wealth of derivative ideas, is an intensely lyrical piece with occasional, excellently calculated and masterly orchestrated emotional outbursts. Both first and second movements are striking in their elemental, almost Mahlerian grandeur and, at the same time, in an almost impeccable sense of proportion; both are surprisingly free from trivialities of any sort. Surely, in the USSR of the mid-1930s such music had few chances to escape ostracism. As to the third movement (*Presto*) – a concise hybrid of scherzo and finale crowned with an emphatically buoyant coda, – it represents a step backwards, to a more commonplace pattern of symphonic finale.[13]

During the rest of the 1930s, Popov worked on incidental music for theatre and movies, having left unrealized several symphonic and opera projects. His greatest success of the 1930s was the music to the enormously popular film *Chapayev* (about a legendary Civil War hero, 1934). His other important works, including two more symphonies, date from the war and early post-war years. Though he continued composing at least until the late 1960s, the rest of his music seems to be of inferior quality, remaining in the confines of average Russian national style. Thus, the Soviet bureaucracy deprived the country of an artist who potentially could become one of Russia's great symphonists of the 20th century.

Prokofiev's return

The year 1936 saw the publication of two notorious *Pravda* editorials, *Muddle Instead of Music* and *Ballet Falsity*, directed against Shostakovich's formalistic deviations. As a result, Shostakovich had to call off the première of his audacious Fourth Symphony (it was first performed only in 1961) and was virtually ousted from the country's cultural scene for more than a year. Another important event that took place in the same year was Prokofiev's definitive return to the USSR. The main achievement of his first Soviet months was the voluminous work on a timely subject, the *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*, conceived a couple of years earlier and officially commissioned by the Radio Committee of the USSR in June 1935. The score calls for two choruses (professional and amateur) and four orchestras (large symphonic, military band, percussion orchestra and accordion orchestra), some five hundred persons on the whole; the time required for its performance is one hour. The texts used are by Marx, Lenin and Stalin. The idea behind the work was to represent the development of the idea of proletarian revolution from its origins, through dramatic peripeteia, up to the final triumph.

Irrespective of whether Prokofiev himself believed in the dogmas of the Communist faith, he succeeded in creating a magnificent Communist "mass" in ten movements, six of which – just as in the Ordinary of the Catholic mass (if we consider *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* as separate movements) – are with text. The movements of the Cantata are arranged in the following order:

1. Orchestral introduction: an image of the original "Big Bang" and primordial chaos. The epigraph (unsung) for this concise movement, taken from the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels (1848) – *A spectre is stalking Europe, the spectre of Communism* – is the very "Word" that was in the beginning of the era of Communism.
2. *Philosophers*, a chorus to Marx's words written in 1845: "The philosophers only explained the world in various ways; but the main point is to change it". The idea of dialectical unity of opposites, central for the Marxist philosophy, is illustrated here by the counterpoint of two different types of choral texture: one half of the choir articulates Marx's text *parlando* in a monotonously measured recitative, while the other half sings a broad melody with the same words.
3. Orchestral interlude based on the thematic material of the introduction. In terms of the work's programme, tracing the prehistory and early history of the Soviet State, this interlude may refer to the unrests of the 19th century beginning, perhaps the Decembrist uprising of 1825.

4. A chorus to the words by Lenin: "We are marching in a close small group along a precipitous and difficult path..." (from the book *What Is to Be Done?*, 1902). Here the plot shifts from the revolutionary theory to the revolutionary practice. The turbulent minor mode and march-like rhythms bring up associations with the song repertoire of the first Russian revolution (1905).
5. Second orchestral interlude depicting, obviously, the failed revolution of 1905 with its Bloody Sunday.
6. *Revolution*. This is the dramatic climax of the whole, the work's most voluminous movement and the only one, in which both choirs and all four orchestras are used. The texts are compiled out of fragments of Lenin's speeches and articles dated from the autumn of 1917. The beginning of the movement is in slow tempo and low dynamics (the phrase "The crisis has ripened" is sung antiphonally by different groups of the choir). Then the music unfolds *accelerando* and *crescendo*; in the culminating section, the narrator with megaphone shouts out bellicose slogans in Lenin's voice.
7. *Victory*, a choral setting of sentences and slogans from Lenin's speeches dated from 1920 – the last year of the Civil War. This movement, despite its title, is prevalently lyrical and songful; in places it is reminiscent of the love scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*.
8. *Oath*, a setting of Stalin's speech in memory of Lenin, 1924. The movement's form reproduces the rhetorical structure of Stalin's "oath" with its alternating refrains, one of which always begins with "Leaving us, Comrade Lenin...", while the other – with "We swear to you, Comrade Lenin...". In accordance with centuries-old liturgical tradition, the music is based on antiphonal singing of two halves of the choir, which unite in a single organism only in some key points.
9. *Symphony*: a piece for symphony orchestra and accordion orchestra representing the joyful picture of the construction of socialism.
10. *The Stalin Constitution*, a setting of Stalin's speech at the 8th Congress of Soviets (December 1936), which had ratified the Constitution of the USSR – the Stalinist equivalent of the Nicene Creed. This hymn-like finale synthesizes some of the most important themes of the previous movements.

Aesthetically, Prokofiev's *Anniversary Cantata* fits rather to the epoch of the 1920s, when dealing with topics of such kind was still compatible with a certain extravagance. In manipulating large orchestral and choral masses, the composer approaches the ideal of popular festival so cherished in the 1920s; in addition, his score comprises some vivid illustrative details (imitations of gunshots and rifle-shots, sirens and so on) also appealing not so much to the spirit of 1937 as to that of the 1920s. In its deeper essence, however, the work is far from being a simple poster. Rather, the composer moves away from his own slogan of "new simplicity" advanced a couple of years earlier,[14] though not so much backwards, to his own conventionally "futurist" vision of Communist society in *The Steel Step*, as in the direction of a new monumental style, full of symphonic élan, rich in dynamic contrasts and variegated orchestral colours, and boldly combining all the conceivable degrees of simplicity and complexity – from an unpretentious graceful melody with delicate accompaniment to overwhelming "cosmic" collisions of choirs and orchestras. This monumental style would reach its full development in the second and the most popular cantata of the "new" Prokofiev, *Aleksandr Nevsky*.

In contrast to the latter work (and not unlike *The Steel Step*), the *Anniversary Cantata* had an unlucky fate. Too much enthusiasm and imagination was invested in this imposing liturgy, too bold and unexpected was the use of words in it to be approved of by its buyers in the year 1937, when the very fact of setting to music the canonized classics of Marxism-Leninism seemed verging on blasphemy. No wonder that the State Committee on Arts Affairs considered the cantata by Prokofiev unacceptable.[15] Prokofiev himself had never heard his work. The première of the Cantata could take place only in 1966, thirteen years after the composer's death. Naturally, both "Stalin" movements (together with the *Symphony* which separates them) had to be cut; in that censored version, the work ended with the recapitulation of the second movement, *Philosophers*. But even the censored score remained unpublished in the USSR.

The official rejection of Prokofiev's cantata logically closed the chain, whose previous links were the ban on the Symphony by Popov, the anti-Shostakovich *Pravda* articles and Shostakovich's forced cancellation of the première of his Fourth Symphony. All these events proved once and for all that the epoch of the 1920s, with its enthusiasm for new forms, extravagance and specific ontological anti-humanism, became a thing of the past (in other areas of culture this had become clear earlier). The era of the regime's consolidation, with its slogan "the life has become better, comrades, the life has become merrier", needed new aesthetics, radically denying any "modernistic" efforts and at the same time purified from the excesses of proletarian dogmatism.

Final remarks

In connection with Prokofiev's *Anniversary Cantata*, a question suggests itself almost automatically: we have no comparable great composers setting Hitler's and other Nazi authors' texts to music, but should we perform such music if we did? The answer lies in the question itself: no valuable artefact can be mentioned as inspired by the Nazi ideology, since no decent artist wanted to identify himself with

Nazism (single exceptions only confirm the rule) – while the Communist ideology proved (and still prove) to be attractive for many. This is quite understandable, not because the latter's practices were more humanistic (of course they weren't), but because Communism's roots are Christian, that is instinctively more acceptable in the Western world (even to atheists) than the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, which is expressly pagan. Hence, Communist parties will continue their existence in democratic countries, albeit on the margins of the political life. For the same reason works like Prokofiev's *Anniversary Cantata*, Shostakovich's early festive symphonies, Deshevov's *Ice and Steel* or Knipper's *The Northern Wind*, despite their unpleasant ideological message, will remain in the cultural memory as valuable achievements of the epoch when the *Sturm und Drang* of Communist ideology was compatible with a *Sturm und Drang* of novel modes of artistic expression.

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1 The most fundamental of these is Gojowy 1980 (enlarged Russian version: Gojowy 2006).

2 Text by Avraamov is available at http://www.etheroneph.com/audiosophia/93-simfoniya-gudkov.html.

3 On the principles of Scriabin's harmony in his late works beginning with *Prometheus*, see Hakobian 2015.

4 Cf. also Bobrik 2011: 67–68.

5 The relations between UE and Soviet musicians are thoroughly examined in Bobrik 2011.

6 His opinion was published in *L'Humanité*, Paris, May 5, 1926, quoted in Shen 1961: 28. Cf. also Zhuravleva 1991: 64.

7 Another „elder cousin| was Casella's piece of 1914, depicting the German tanks' invasion of Belgium (No. 1 of his cycle *Pagine di guerra*, initially for piano 4 hands, orchestrated in 1918). To the best of my knowledge, this was the earliest representation in music of a coordinated work of many mechanisms. *The Factory* shows more than a passing resemblance to this miniature.

8 See his letter to Jaworski of 12 June 1927 (Shostakovich 1997: 40). Shostakovich, obviously, referred to an incident, of which he was a witness during the street skirmish in February 1917, when a Cossack killed a boy with his sabre. This fact of Shostakovich's biography, in connection with the Second Symphony, was first mentioned in Grinberg 1927: 17.

9 Though the Yurodivy motif was of prime importance for Shostakovich's oeuvre, he was by no means a *yurodivy* ("sacred fool") himself. The odd fashion to label Shostakovich as a kind of modern-time *yurodivy*, set by Solomon Volkov in the Introduction to his *Testimony* (Volkov 1979: xxv–xxix), testifies to a complete misunderstanding of this characteristically Russian religious phenomenon. Any authentic *yurodivy* was, first, a social outsider and, second, a purely instinctive, unreflective human being. Needless to say, neither of these qualities has anything to do with Shostakovich's persona.

10 See Shebalin 1975: 41.

11 See especially Hakobian 2004: 78ff.

12 For more information about the work's misadventures, see Romashchuk 1985.

13 For a detailed analysis of the score, see Barsova 2007 (Scriabin's *Le Poème divin* is cited here as one of possible sources of the Symphony's conception: 97–98).

14 Cf. his article in *Izvestiya* (November 16, 1934), quoted in Nest'yev 1973: 359; Prokofiev 1991: 128. Strictly speaking, the slogan of simplicity had appeared in his statements already in 1930 (cf. his interviews given to American newspapers, quoted in Prokofiev 1991: 89–91).

15 Cf. the report of a witness: Grinberg 1968: 20–21. Cf. also Morrison 2009: 65–66.

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Santrauka

Boriso Schwarzo, šaltojo karo autoriteto sovietinės muzikos kontekste, požiūriu, trečiame dešimtmetyje modernūs Sovietų Rusijos kompozitoriai tiesiog kopijavo „išorines priemones [ir] modernistinius triukus", iš Vakarų importuotus Didžiosios ekonominės krizės metu, 1929–1930 m. Nors XX a. devintame dešimtmetyje požiūris ėmė kisti dėl svarbių muzikologinių pastangų ir kiek pavėluotų pirmųjų kūrinių įrašų, vis dėlto dar gana gyvybinga nuomonė, kad „Rusijos [ankstyvo XX a.] muzikinis avangardas labiau vertingas ne tiek dėl savo pasiekimų profesionalios kompozicijos srityje, kiek dėl pastangų intensyvumo ir konceptualios drąsos" (Andreas Wehrmeyer). Toks požiūris galbūt ir tinka kelioms ne itin svarbioms muzikos pasaulio figūroms, kurios veikė apie 1917 m., tačiau būtų neteisinga nuvertinti Rusijos (tuo metu jau Sovietų) inovatyvių srovių svarbą, kuri buvo stipriai juntama trečiame dešimtmetyje ir paveikė ketvirto dešimtmečio tendencijas.

1917-ųjų Spalio revoliucija užbaigė vadinamąjį rusiškos kultūros Sidabro amžių ir paskatino masinę emigraciją visų, kurie buvo šio nuostabaus, gaivališko menų, literatūros ir humanitarinių mokslų klestėjimo dalyviai. Dauguma menininkų nerodė jokio noro bendradarbiauti su agresyviu, avantiūrizmo kupinu naujuoju režimu. Tuo pat metu tam tikros svarbios avangardo, kairiųjų figūros vis dar išsaugojo kai kurias iliuzijas, susijusias su revoliucinėmis bolševikų intencijomis ne tik politikoje, bet ir kultūroje.

Tendencija, apie kurią kalbame, buvo svarbi to laikotarpio tarptautinio modernizmo dalis ir modernizmo judėjimų Rusijos literatūroje, teatre, vaizduojamuose menuose detalė (kurį laiką tai atrodė visiškai suderinama su komunizmo ideologija). Išskyrus daugmaž reguliariai atliekamus Nikolajaus Roslaveco, Vladimiro Deševovo, Leonido Polovinkino, Aleksandro Mosolovo ir kai kurių kitų kompozitorių darbus, tuo metu buvo sukurta bent keli grandioziniai šedevrai, kurių stilistika drąsiai lygiavosi į ekstremalų tarptautinį avangardą – tai Dmitrijaus Šostakovičiaus „Nosis" ir Simfonija Nr. 2 „Spaliui", Gavrilo Popovo Simfonija Nr. 1, Sergejaus Prokofjevo „Kantata Spalio revoliucijos dvidešimtosioms metinėms". Visi šie ilgi kūriniai buvo visiškai nežinomi išoriniam pasauliui ir sąmoningai sulaikomi šalies viduje. Regis, net ir dabar dėl įvairių objektyvių ir subjektyvių priežasčių estetinė ir istorinė jų reikšmė lieka nepakankamai įvertinta. Tarpukario Rusijos modernizmas nusipelno būti vertinamas kaip menine prasme vertingas reiškinys, integruotas į „didžiąją" Rusijos ir kitų šalių meno istoriją, o ne kaip vietinės reikšmės kuriozų rinkinys.