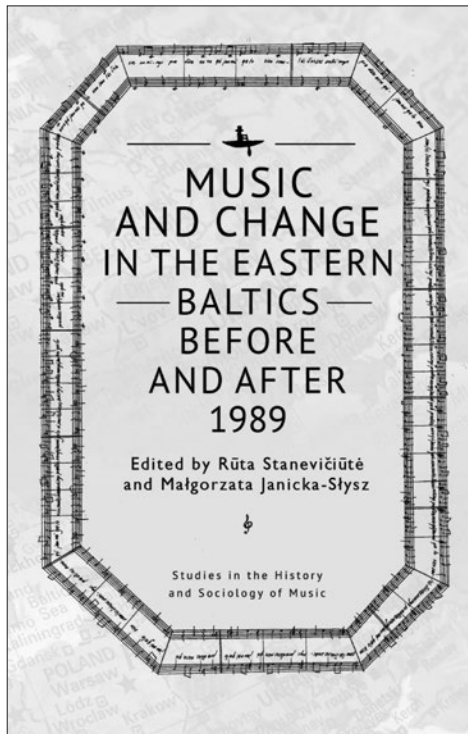


Živilė ARNAŠIŪTĖ

Review of *Music and Change in the Eastern Baltics Before and After 1989*

Eds. Rūta Stanevičiūtė, Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz,
Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022. 362 p.
ISBN 9781644698945



The review was published in:

SEER / Slavonic and East European Review, Modern Humanities Research Association, Volume 101, Number 4, October 2023, p. 786–788.

THIS volume frames the Eastern Baltics as a distinct category, offering fresh insights into the interconnected music histories along the Baltic shore, united by geographical proximity and Soviet hegemony. These connections unveil broader dynamics within the Eastern Bloc and present less-studied musical histories of Lithuania and Latvia in English-language scholarship. The twelve essays, with authors from the US, Lithuania, Poland and Russia, highlight cultural and socio-political entanglement with music criticism, events, promotion, composition and performance. The book is divided into three parts: 1) cultural encounters; 2) musical liberation; and 3) music within political transitions.

Overarching themes, including informal networks, cultural exchange, utopian pursuits, models of freedom and generational change, shed light on shared patterns.

One significant shared pattern is the emphasis on scenes, rather than composers or works per se. Kevin C. Karnes (chapter 9) advocates a ‘horizontal’ approach to Soviet cultural histories, emphasizing local overcentral dynamics. He explores Hardijs Lediņš’s unconventional Soviet discos in Riga during the 1970s and 1980s and notes their USSR-wide fascination, attracting Alfred Schnittke and Arvo Pärt. Unlike Western practices, these educational/stationary discos featured listening-focused lectures and dancing, inviting the public to perceive the Soviet world anew. In the 1980s Lediņš added a multimedia dimension, enabling immersive experience of physical surroundings. He aspired to create a socialist utopia, embodying early Soviet ideals of communality, accessibility and care for others, despite the system’s shortcomings. Vīta Gruodytė (chapter 8) delves into Lithuania’s alternative festivals in 1985 and 1995. These interdisciplinary events rejected hierarchical structures, favouring instead happenings and performances in less monitored and unconventional spaces, including swimming pools. Established Lithuanian composers endorsed these student-led activities due to their common goal of reshaping and de-Sovietizing Lithuanian music. Dominika Micał (chapter 3) explores Baranów Sandomierski’s and Sandomierz’s meetings that fuelled Polish music scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. They combined academic discussions with concerts, films, plays and readings, attracting crowds from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Lithuania. These meetings offered a communal atmosphere outside stringent official super-inspection, yet required friendly relations with sympathetic officials to continue. Subsequently, Andrzej Mądro (chapter 11) observes the formation of the yass scene in the 1990s Poland, a response to both jazz stagnation and institutional conservatism. Yass emerged from the Totart movement, rejecting musical hierarchies and social norms. It advocated free jazz, humour and shock as expressions of freedom.

There is, perhaps predictably, a moment to contemplate the Soviet centre of gravity, handled astutely by Peter J. Schmelz (chapter 10) in particular. He navigates the 1980s US-USSR cultural exchange through tours by the Rova Saxophone Quartet and The Ganelin Trio, highlighting the persistent dominance of the US narrative well into the twenty-first century. Schmelz shows that jazz is a symbol of democratic freedom in the US, which linked with the concept of *glasnost* (openness) in the Soviet space. While emphasizing the significant role of non-state actors and fluctuating policies, Schmelz also shows touring musicians' freedom of expression and glimpses of transcendence. Most chapters explore memories of transformative events, but Olga Manulkina (chapter 12) captures post-Soviet Russia's short-lived free press. Leonid Desiatnikov's coverage in the 1990s shaped the new music criticism toward balancing tradition and innovation and examining academic and popular aspects, all of which waned with dwindling media independence.

The volume also leans on transnational informal relations, especially around a Polish-driven network. Rūta Stanevičiūtė (chapter 1) studies the intricate Poland-Lithuania musical network in the late 1970s, emphasizing unofficial collaboration and transformation. Małgorzata Janicka-Słysz (chapter 2) highlights common values of freedom in the Polish-Lithuanian scene. Both nations share similar aesthetic tendencies, including the symbolic meaning of

music as freedom 'from' imposed Communism and freedom 'for' the spiritual and personal. Kinga Kiwała (chapter 4) discusses Poland's generational fissure during the 1970s. United by resistance to socio-political oppression, composers embraced the Romanticist aesthetic in opposing forms. Generation 33, including Krzysztof Penderecki and Mikołaj Górecki, constructed a collective national ethos while Generation 51 sought individualistic expressions of freedom, often evading religion and nationalism. Freedom aesthetics are further explored in discussions of works by Penderecki (in chapter 5 by Iwona Sowińska-Fruhtrunk) and Górecki (in chapter 6 by Teresa Malecka). Meanwhile, Ewa Czachorowska-Zygor (chapter 7) delves into freedom within Polish film music.

This collection evokes a rich music historiography, underscoring the value of focusing on scenes and local events, notably highlighted by Karnes. It features a methodological emphasis on network-driven analysis, facilitating a comparative exploration of intricate musical interconnections. Furthermore, several discussions, especially by Schmelz, accentuate the perpetual flux in interpretive meanings, particularly regarding concepts such as 'freedom'. They elucidate the continuous reinvention and dynamic nature of these ideas for both scholars and the musicians they study. Collectively, these significant perspectives intertwine, offering a multifaceted lens to comprehend the complex musical narratives within the Eastern Baltics.