

Nationally Informed: The Politics of National Minority Music during Late Stalinism

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Introduction

After consolidating its control over the former Russian Empire, the new Soviet state endeavored to distinguish itself from its imperial predecessor by demonstrating its support for the panoply of national minorities now under its jurisdiction. Imperial Russia had sought to Russify the peoples of its western borderlands and exert colonial dominance over those in the Caucasus and Central Asia. By contrast, Soviet officials made a concerted effort to celebrate the Union's internal diversity and enable all national cultures to flourish. This strategy took a variety of forms, from creation of nationality-based autonomous regions and republics, to promotion of titular nationalities into administrative posts through the policy of *korenizatsiia*, to establishment of indigenous-language educational and media institutions.¹ It also had a profound effect on the official approach to cultural production, not least in the area of music.

For Soviet leaders, supporting the musical cultures of the national minorities meant both granting a new sense of value to existing folk traditions and bringing those traditions into the present by creating a repertoire of folk-inflected operas, symphonies, and chamber works for each minority group. These dual processes got underway in the 1930s, after the Soviet Union's internal borders were settled and the militant "proletarianism" of the Cultural Revolution gave way to the more staid, ethnocentric atmosphere of the Second Five Year Plan.² As Marina Frolova-Walker has detailed, Russian composers initially took the lead. Employing the ethos and methods of 19th-century Romantic nationalism, they made ethnographic collections of indigenous folksongs and wove them into new symphonic and operatic works.³ This literature was intended only as a placeholder, however. Soviet officials envisioned national minorities themselves soon taking over, making use of compositional skills acquired at newly-built national conservatories and collaborating with their Russian "guests."

The first generation of Soviet-educated national minority composers came of age as WWII drew to a close, in the late Stalinist era. Typically, they studied first at a local conservatory, then traveled to Moscow to complete their education, in recognition of Russians' status as the musically "most advanced" nationality. Even as they emerged into this broader arena, however, minority composers found themselves entangled in the burgeoning *zhdanovshchina*, the late Stalinist state's drive to reassert its authority over the creative intelligentsia after relatively lax oversight during WWII (discussed below). Yet, by demanding that cultural producers turn away from Western influences and focus on Soviet, and particularly folk, themes, the *zhdanovshchina* created a significant opportunity for aspiring composers from the national republics. The state was eager to showcase the results of its cultural construction efforts, and provided these composers were willing to work within their national idiom, a lucrative career at the all-Union level awaited. At the

¹ For development of these policies, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapters 1-5.

² On internal boundaries, see Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress." On the ethnocentric turn, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapter 11.

³ Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics"

same time, if they should wish to move beyond the limits of national music into the supranational realm of Soviet music in which their Russian colleagues worked, the future was far less certain. Indeed, as the new generation of minority composers found when they brought their works-in-progress for audition at the Composers' Union, the late Stalinist state's national music initiative was as much a limiting force as an empowering one.

Recently, scholars have considered Soviet nationalities policy from a variety of angles. Terry Martin, Ron Suny, Yuri Slezkine, Francine Hirsch, and Kate Brown have explored the successes, failures, and unexpected results of the state's desire to categorize and promote citizens based on ethnicity.⁴ Others have investigated the impact on culture in Central Asia, with Adrienne Edgar examining the development of Turkmen identity, Adeeb Khalid and Paul Stronski focusing on intellectual life and architecture, respectively, and Douglas Northrop and Marianne Kamp elucidating the conflict over veiling practices.⁵ Jeffrey Veidlinger, Brigid O'Keeffe and Mayhill Fowler have brought the study of Soviet nationalities policy to the performing arts.⁶ Among scholars of Soviet music, Boris Schwarz and Levon Hakobian have addressed nationalities policy within broader studies, while Richard Taruskin and Marina Frolova-Walker have examined Russian and Soviet musical nationalism.⁷ Further, Andy Nercessian, Pekka Suutari, Matthew O'Brien, Inna Naroditskaya, and Tanya Merchant have investigated how nationalities policy drove the development of musical nationalism in the Soviet republics, while Michael Rouland and Boram Shin have explored similar themes through republican *dekady* (discussed below).⁸ Finally, while Frolova-Walker critiqued the Soviet goal of establishing unique music for each republic, Serhy Yekelchuk and Kiril Tomoff have demonstrated how this directive opened a space for Ukrainian and Uzbek musicians to assert musical autonomy at home, particularly during the *zhdanovshchina*.⁹

This article expands on this literature by focusing on the experiences of national minority composers who auditioned their pieces in Moscow during the late Stalinist era. Drawing on stenographic reports of the Composers' Union's Consultation Commission and Symphony and Chamber Music Section between 1945 and 1953, I will demonstrate that such aspirants were welcomed by the leading lights of Soviet music, but also made to

⁴ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*; Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment"; Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*; Brown, *A Biography of No Place*

⁵ Edgar, *Tribal Nation*; Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan*; Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City*; Northrop, *Veiled Empire*; Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*

⁶ Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater*; O'Keeffe, *New Soviet Gypsies*; Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire's Edge*

⁷ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*; Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987*; Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*; Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*; Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics"

⁸ Nercessian, "National Identity, Cultural Policy and the Soviet Folk Ensemble in Armenia"; Suutari, "Going Beyond the Border: National Cultural Policy and the Development of Musical Life in Soviet Karelia, 1920-1940"; Rouland, "A Nation on Stage: Music and the 1936 Festival of Kazak Arts"; O'Brien, "Uzeyir Hajibeyov and His Role in the Development of Musical Life in Azerbaïdzhan"; Naroditskaya, *Songs from the Land of Fire*; Merchant, *Women Musicians of Uzbekistan*; Shin, "National Form and Socialist Content: Soviet Modernization and Making of Uzbek National Opera Between the 1920s and 1930s"

⁹ Yekelchuk, "Diktat and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture"; Tomoff, "Uzbek Music's Separate Path"

know their place.¹⁰ Their value to the state lay in their ability to embody the Soviet ideal of the enlightened, modernized, and empowered minority musician, and those who followed this script received high praise. By contrast, those who pursued more open-ended musical exploration were rebuked for overstepping the mark. In the end, I will argue, such composers were not able to break out of the national minority framework. While Soviet nationalities policy created a host of new opportunities for them as Soviet minority composers, it foreclosed on the possibility of their transcending national identity and becoming Soviet composers in a broader sense.

Policy, Presuppositions, and Priorities

Soviet efforts to promote minority musical cultures, like Soviet nationalities policy as a whole, revolved around the concept of modernization. As Terry Martin has explained, at the time of the October Revolution Bolshevik leaders understood nationalism primarily as a response to imperialism, which would give way to proletarian internationalism after the overthrow of the imperial government. When experience proved otherwise, they revised their theoretical position to allow for a temporary surge in national feeling—the rallying cry of oppressed peoples finally made free—which the nascent Soviet government should support while constructing the modern workers’ state. Once the benefits of modernization had kicked in, they believed this nationalist impulse would fade, as class divisions emerged and minority citizens learned to embrace class over nation.¹¹

Soviet nationalities policy underwent a major shift during the First Five Year Plan, when, in response to national assertiveness and resistance to agricultural collectivization in Ukraine, the Stalinist state began to view minority nations with cross-border ties as suspect. As a result, national categories became essentialized and primordialized, and the state embarked simultaneously on ethnic cleansing of newly-designated “enemy nations” and celebration of national distinctiveness, particularly in the arts. Under Stalin’s new rubric of the “Friendship of the Peoples,” Russians, whose national expression had previously been suppressed, were now encouraged to mine their folk culture for inspiration.¹² Lenin had feared that such displays would reek of “Great Power chauvinism,” reinforcing rather than undermining the dynamics of empire. But in the altered conditions of the mid-1930s, Russians became the “first among equals,” the most progressive Soviet nation, leading the way to the modernized socialist future by celebrating their creativity alongside that of their “brother nations.”

The Stalinist state thus endorsed indigenous music-making as a politically acceptable form of national self-expression, while incorporating it into its modernizing mission. In service of this new direction, in the 1930s Soviet officials devoted scarce re-

¹⁰ The Consultation Commission was renamed the Symphony and Chamber Music Section and limited to these genres in 1948 as part of the overhaul of the Composers’ Union following the Central Committee’s resolution on music. See “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O smene rukovodstva Komiteta po delam iskusstv pri SM SSSR i Orgkomiteta Soiuz sovetskikh kompozitorov SSSR,’ 26 ianvaria 1948g.” in Artizov and Naumov eds., *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, pp. 628-629 and Tomoff, *Creative Union*, pp. 37-62, 189-213.

¹¹ This paragraph and the next draw from Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, chapters 1, 6-11

¹² Stalin coined the phrase “Friendship of the Peoples” in a speech given to Turkmen collective farmers in December 1935. “Rech’ tovarishcha Stalina,” *Pravda* (6 Dec 1935), 3

sources to developing “modernized” versions of traditional musical ensembles: enlarged, professionalized folksong and dance troupes performing on folk instruments adapted into “families” with standardized pitch and register.¹³ These ensembles toured regionally and nationally, and between 1936 and 1941 they dazzled in Moscow at a series of *dekady*, ten-day performance extravaganzas devoted to nine of the Soviet Union’s eleven republics and the Buryat-Mongol ASSR.¹⁴

The exclusion of two republics from this venture, the RSFSR and Turkmen SSR, reveals two major presuppositions undergirding Soviet nationalities policy. First, *dekady* were intended to showcase each nation’s cultural development. Soviet officials presupposed such a progress report was unnecessary for the RSFSR, now essentialized as Russia, because as the beneficiaries of imperial hegemony, Russians already possessed the “most advanced” musical culture. At the same time, while Russian national expression was now encouraged, Russian identity remained intimately bound up with Soviet identity, through Russia’s leading role in the Friendship of the Peoples. This framework established Russian music to some extent as supranational, and thus normative, in the minds of bureaucrats and citizens alike.

Second, the lack of a Turkmen *dekada* reveals another official presupposition: that Soviet nations could be placed on a hierarchical developmental scale, and those at the bottom, like the Turkmen, were too underdeveloped to have much musical culture at all. This Orientalizing perspective was central to the Soviet state’s conception of its relationship to its minorities. As early as 1921, the Tenth Party Congress adopted a resolution stating that because Imperial Russia had kept such peoples “in ignorance... [and] political backwardness... The Party’s task is to help the laboring masses of non-Russian peoples catch up with Central Russia.”¹⁵ Stalin’s Friendship of the Peoples framework significantly reinforced this view by emphasizing Russia’s “leading” role and requiring minority nations to express gratitude for its aid in raising their cultural level.

Dekady centered on performance of newly-composed national operas. The emphasis on this genre highlights another form of musical modernization, on which the Soviet state placed great emphasis: the creation of Western-style classical music tailored to each national minority. Such music was to incorporate indigenous folk melodies and harmonies into complex Western forms like opera, symphony, and chamber music, resulting in an accessible, yet sophisticated, uniquely Soviet hybrid repertoire. The prioritization of such forms resulted largely from the fact that Lenin, Stalin, and their Bolshevik contem-

¹³ On professionalized ensembles, see Nercessian, “National Identity, Cultural Policy and the Soviet Folk Ensemble in Armenia”; on arranged folk music and reconstructed instruments see Merchant, *Women Musicians of Uzbekistan*, pp. 83-96. A few folk ensembles began performing in Imperial Russia at the close of the 19th century. Soviet officials brought them under state control and directed their further development.

¹⁴ On *dekady*, see Rouland, “A Nation on Stage: Music and the 1936 Festival of Kazak Arts” and Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, chapter 6. The Soviet Union acquired four additional republics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Moldova) after WWII. Beginning in 1937, the state also held annual all-Union *dekady* of Soviet music, hosted in multiple cities simultaneously, but these were separate from the national *dekady*. See Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, p. 133 and Kotkina, “Soviet Empire and Operatic Realm,” p. 517.

¹⁵ “Rezoliutsiia ob ocherednykh zadachakh partii v national’nom voprose,” in *Desiatyi s’ezd RKP(b) mart 1921g.*, p. 603

poraries had received elite educations and, despite their revolutionary ideals, shared the bourgeois certainty that in its harmonic complexity and emotional expressivity, Western Romanticism represented the highest form of musical development. Indeed, Maxim Gorky famously recalled Lenin exclaiming, “I know nothing which is greater than [Beethoven’s] *Appassionata*... It is marvelous, super-human music... It affects your nerves.”¹⁶ Though the Romantic era had passed by 1917, the Bolsheviks favored Romanticism over younger-generation avant-gardism, because they believed that all people, regardless of cultural background, perceive the emotional content of music in the same way. They rejoiced that Mikhail Glinka had brought this tradition to Russia in the mid-19th century and the “Mighty Five” developed it into a fully-fledged Russian national style a generation later.¹⁷ Further, they believed the imperial government had purposely withheld such riches from its subject peoples and sought to correct that cultural crime.

While fostering classical music cultures for its newly-essentialized minorities in the 1930s, however, the Stalinist state also imposed limits. Cognizant that the Mighty Five had contributed to a post-Napoleonic wave of Russian nationalist sentiment, it sought to ensure that emergent minority repertoires provided a form of national expression without becoming a source of “bourgeois nationalism.” Stalin addressed this distinction while nationalities policy was still in transition, in his speech to the Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930:

“What is national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat? It is culture *socialist* in content and national in form, having the object of educating the masses in the spirit of socialism and internationalism... The period of building socialism in the USSR is a period of the *flowering* of national cultures... for under the Soviet system, the nations are not ordinary “modern” nations, but *socialist* nations, just as their national cultures are in content not ordinary bourgeois cultures, but *socialist* cultures.”¹⁸

The Stalinist formula “national in form, socialist in content” soon became a watchword of musical development across the Soviet Union. Soon, 19th-century Russian composers were being reevaluated (and sometimes revised) within this frame, and Soviet composers strove to use it as a rubric.¹⁹

Fortunately, Western-style classical music lent itself exceptionally well to this endeavor. The demand for “national form” could be satisfied by employing folk melodies, directly transcribed or improvised upon, as thematic material. And complex orchestral forms fulfilled the mandate for modernized socialist content. What’s more, nationally-inflected classical music was a perfect fit for the new official aesthetic established in 1934, Socialist Realism. In the 1920s, Soviet music was marked by competition between avant-gardists and “proletarianizers,” who promoted an imagined new music of the work-

¹⁶ Gorky, *Days With Lenin*, p. 52

¹⁷ This is the popular myth of Russia’s musical development, which Marina Frolova-Walker complicates in her monograph *Russian Music and Nationalism*. The “Mighty Five” were Miliĭ Balakirev, Aleksandr Borodin, César Cui, Modest Musorgskii Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

¹⁸ I.V. Stalin, “Politicheskii otchet Tsentral’nogo Komiteta XVI s’ezdu VKP(b) 27 iunia 1930g.,” pp. 367-368. Stalin coined an earlier version of this formula (“national in form, proletarian in content”) in a 1925 speech at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. See “Tovari-shch Stalin o politicheskikh zadachakh universiteta narodov Vostoka,” pp. 2-3.

¹⁹ Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet Opera Project”; Fairclough, *Classics for the Masses*, chapter 4

ing class. The state remained neutral until the Cultural Revolution, when it allowed the “proletarianizers” to gain ascendance. But their militancy produced little, and between 1932 and 1934—in tandem with the shift in nationalities policy toward ethnocentrism and celebration of cultural difference—the state established unified creative unions under its jurisdiction, including the Composers’ Union, and directed them to produce Socialist Realist artworks.²⁰ In music, these two policy shifts resulted in a revalorization of the “classics,” particularly the Mighty Five, in whom neither side had expressed interest during the 1920s, and a turn toward folk music. *Narodnost’*, or folk-mindedness, became a watchword. Further, Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov defined Socialist Realism as requiring artists to “depict reality in its revolutionary development,” a call that could be answered while enhancing one’s claim to socialist content by adding a program referring to Soviet heroes, festivals, and agricultural and industrial triumphs.²¹

The demand for *narodnost’* applied to all nationalities, but Russians, as representatives of the “most progressive” nation, had a broader range of means at their disposal. Whereas the handful of minority composers were directed to use their own folk music, Russians could choose from Russian folk music, revolutionary and mass songs, and the folk music of minority nations to whom they extended a fraternal hand. Indeed, this last option enabled composers like Aleksandr Mosolov and Nikolai Roslavets, who had been hounded out of the profession by “proletarianizers” in the 1920s, to rebuild their careers as modernizers of Uzbek and Turkmen music in the following decade.²²

By the late 1930s, Soviet composers had successfully developed a repertoire of Western-style classical music based on minority folk material, much of it written by Russians, all of it celebrated at *dekady*. With the onset of WWII, the state relaxed its oversight, while propagandizing Russia’s “leading” role more than ever. Indeed, for Soviet propagandists, it was the unique Soviet paradigm, in which Russia led the less-developed nations in mutual endeavor, that enabled victory and would ensure a radiant future.

When regular musical life resumed in 1945, discussions in the Composers’ Union revealed how deeply participants, the vast majority of whom were Russian, had internalized the Stalinist imagined hierarchy of national development. For example, in January 1945, during a discussion of Aleksei Aksenov’s pieces based on Tuvan melodies, speakers expressed open condescension toward Tuvan culture. Composer Viktor Belyi declared the Tuvan region “quite barbarous [*dovol’no dikaia*] in musical development.” Similarly, musicologist Aleksei Ogolevets sympathized that

“Composers, especially Muscovites, masters, working in the localities, always come under fire from local musicians who don’t want to allow alterations to their melodic language... It’s hard for them to comprehend arrangements that enrich it... But we, from the perspective of our great acoustic knowledge must make other demands.”²³

²⁰ Nelson, *Music for the Revolution*; Fitzpatrick, “The Soft Line on Culture and Its Enemies”

²¹ Zhdanov defined the term “Socialist Realism” at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. See “Rech’ sekretaria TsK VKP(b) A. A. Zhdanova,” in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934*, p. 614. On programs, see Frolova-Walker, “‘Music is Obscure’”

²² Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, chapter 6

²³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, ll.26, 34

As most Muscovites “working in the localities” were Russian, Ogolevets’ comment can be read as a reference to Russians’ presumed “leading” status. Though Aksenov’s pieces were found less than satisfactory, his colleagues clearly felt he deserved a break, considering the retrograde material at hand.

Even composers working with national music often employed such patronizing rhetoric. Aksenov asserted defensively that Tuva was “an entirely untouched land. No one has collected there; no one knows this material... It has such a markedly architectural structure... [that] it’s hard to find an avenue for development.”²⁴ Later that year, Lidia Auster expressed a similar sentiment about her work with Turkmen themes. She remarked, “Turkmen melodies contrast very little... I used a trite Turkmen song that delights Turkmen people; for a composer it’s not very interesting, but I selected it for the Turkmen audience.”²⁵ To be sure, such composers had an interest in maintaining this Orientalizing viewpoint. While the directive to create nationally-based classical works provided a career opportunity, perpetuation of it rested on minority cultures continuing to be regarded as underdeveloped. Even so, the frequency of such remarks demonstrates how completely Russian-majority Union-level composers had adopted the essentialization of minority musics as both “other” and lesser.

Just as Soviet musical life was returning to normal, another stark policy shift emerged: the *zhdanovshchina*, named for Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov. During three weeks in August and September 1946, the Central Committee released a series of resolutions condemning missteps in literature, theater, and film and levying harsh penalties against those held responsible.²⁶ It was the opening salvo in the state’s campaign to reassert authority over creative producers, after lax wartime oversight. These resolutions reflected growing Cold War tensions in accusing Soviet artists of producing “ideologically harmful” works that denigrated Soviet people and institutions, and demonstrating “a spirit of servility to contemporary bourgeois Western culture.”²⁷ They also named names. The first resolution singled out Russian authors Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova, while the second criticized the repertoires of nine major theaters (seven in the RSFSR), and the third attacked Ukrainian director Leonid Lukov’s film *A Great Life*. A year and a half later, the Central Committee added a fourth resolution, this time on music.

The final *zhdanovshchina* resolution, “On the Opera *The Great Friendship* by V. Muradeli,” replicated the rhetoric of its predecessors, but differed on two significant points. First, its target, Vano Muradeli, was a Georgian and member of the older generation of minority composers, who had begun his career before Soviet nationalities policy

²⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.49

²⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.123, l.167

²⁶ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O zhurnalakh *Zvezda i Leningrad*,’ 14 avgusta 1946g.”; “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O repertuare dramaticheskikh teatrov i merakh po ego uluchsheniui,’ 26 avgusta 1946g.”; and “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O kinofil’me *Bol’shaia zhizn*” 4 sentiabria 1946g.” all in Artizov and Naumov, eds. *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, pp. 587–91, 591–96, 598–602

²⁷ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O zhurnalakh *Zvezda i Leningrad*,’ 14 avgusta 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov eds., *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, pp. 587, 588

was fully developed.²⁸ Second, it criticized Muradeli specifically for “not availing himself of the wealth of folk melodies, songs, and dance motifs in which the... peoples of the Northern Caucasus, where the action is set, are so rich.”²⁹ The resolution on film had also condemned a minority production—Lukov was Ukrainian and his film set in the Donbass—but addressed it in overarching Soviet terms, never using the word “Ukraine.” Even the film’s songs were found guilty only of “indecent melancholy foreign to the *Soviet* people.”³⁰ Thus, in targeting Muradeli and tying him explicitly to the Caucasus and its folk music, the resolution on music brought the *zhdanovshchina* firmly into the sphere of Soviet nationalities policy. Indeed, even the opera’s name resonated strongly; “The Great Friendship” was the title of *Pravda*’s December 1935 report on the event at which Stalin had coined the phrase “Friendship of the Peoples” and became a commonplace thereafter.³¹

This was not the first time the late Stalinist state addressed national self-expression among the minority intelligentsia. David Brandenberger has outlined its attack on minority historians and writers for taking on pre-imperial and anti-imperial subjects, beginning in 1944, which he links to the *zhdanovshchina* through its assertion of centralized authority, and Serhy Yekelchuk and Maïke Lehmann have traced Ukrainian and Armenian intellectuals’ agency in preserving local histories while bowing to the state’s demand for prioritization of Russian narratives.³² Muradeli’s case is similar in that he, too, was criticized for failing to foreground the “leading” role of Russians in his tale of civil war in the Caucasus. But there is an important difference: while minority historians were directed to downplay national elements, Muradeli was effectively told to enhance them—not through plot, but through music. During the *zhdanovshchina*, then, the Soviet musical community was on high alert, and particularly concerned that minority composers employ folk elements in new musical works.

This confluence of factors created a unique situation for national minority composers in the late Stalinist era. The Soviet state took pride in the growing repertoires of nationally-inflected classical music, but its nationalities policy would not truly be fulfilled until minorities themselves took over from Russians. Its impatience to demonstrate progress in raising the national minorities out of colonial oppression while continuing to essentialize their distinctiveness meant that for ambitious young minority composers, Western-style classical music provided a major opportunity to build a lucrative career at the all-Union level. As the state established new conservatories in the Caucasus in the

²⁸ Muradeli was born into an Armenian family in Georgia but identified with Georgian nationality. He graduated from the recently-founded Tbilisi Conservatory in 1931, then studied at Moscow State Conservatory from 1934-1938.

²⁹ “Postanovlenie Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘Ob opere *Velikaia druzhba* V Muradeli’ 10 fevralia 1948g,” in Artizov and Naumov eds., *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, p. 630

³⁰ “Postanovlenie Orgbiuro TsK VKP(b) ‘O kinofil’me *Bol’shaia zhizn*’ 4 sentiabria 1946g.” in Artizov and Naumov eds., *Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, p. 600. Emphasis mine.

³¹ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, p. 440. Muradeli’s opera went through several titles, including *Sergo Ordzhonikidze* and *The Extraordinary Commissar*. The Bolshoi Theater changed it to *The Great Friendship* when it scheduled the opera to premiere on the thirtieth anniversary of the Revolution. See Herrala, *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music*, pp. 186-187

³² Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, chapter 11; Yekelchuk, *Stalin’s Empire of Memory*; Lehmann, “The Local Reinvention of the Soviet Project”

1920s and Central Asia in the 1930s-1940s, it was only a matter of time before such aspirants began arriving in Moscow to audition their new works at the Composers' Union. Due to its longer history of cultural exchange with Russia and the earlier founding of its conservatories, the first wave arose from the Caucasus.

Embracing the National Form

Minority composers generally found themselves welcomed at the Composers' Union. In August 1947, three young Armenians, Adam Khudoian, Aleksandr Arutiunian, and Edvard Mirzoian, brought their string quartets to the Consultation Commission. The trio had graduated from Yerevan State Conservatory the year before and relocated to continue their studies with Genrikh Litinskii at Moscow State Conservatory. For composers, the consultative sections served as a venue to share works-in-progress with colleagues, receive professional evaluation, and obtain recommendations for performance and publication.³³ For national minority composers, the sections played an additional role, introducing them to the all-Union arena and potentially launching them into successful Union-level careers.

This was certainly the hope of the three Armenian aspirants. And they were not disappointed. Musicologist Aleksei Ikonnikov praised them for the professionalism of their technique and the individuality of their musical expression. Yet, in doing so, he framed their achievements in terms of national identity. Though Ikonnikov found one passage in Mirzoian's quartet reminiscent of Shostakovich, he quickly rejected this association, remarking, "I think this device is dictated purely by the national specifics of Armenian folk music." Further, he praised the Armenian SSR for sending its talented sons to Moscow to learn from "the higher mastery of the center."³⁴ Speaking as their teacher, Litinskii couched his evaluation in similar terms. Affirming the strong influence of the "Russian musical school" on their work, he noted that they had also studied Brahms, Beethoven, and Miaskovskii, to gain as much as possible from the classical tradition. "We have before us," he declared, "young Armenian composers who must resolve their goals... by national means, and I'm very glad that this national style was adopted by each in his own way."³⁵ As these comments demonstrate, at the Composers' Union, Khudoian, Arutiunian, and Mirzoian were seen first and foremost as Armenians, whose compositions would, of course, express their essentialized national identity. Armenians ranked fairly high on the imagined national-musical developmental scale, as evidenced by celebrated predecessors like Aleksandr Spendiarov and Aram Khachaturian. But they were certainly not at the level of Russians. These three had done well in recognizing the need for further education in Moscow and applying their newfound mastery to Armenian folk material in service of advancing Armenian national music.

Indeed, this perspective had become so ingrained by the late 1940s that minority participants also adopted it. Avet Ter-Gabrielian, the first violinist of the Komitas Quartet, who had traveled from his Armenian village on the Don River to Moscow to learn his

³³ On the consultative sections, see Leah Goldman, "Art of Intransigence: Soviet Composers and Art Music Censorship, 1945-1957," pp. 130-190.

³⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.171, l.48ob

³⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.208, l.10ob (Several pages are missing from the Consultation Commission's copy of the stenograph but exist in the Young Composers' Section's copy.)

craft, recalled that when his ensemble first set up shop in Yerevan, they encountered a musical “dead end.” He hailed the arrival of the first Armenian-penned string quartets, “the thing we’ve dreamed of,” as a major sign of progress.³⁶ He was seconded by Georgian composer Nikolai Narimanidze, who had also studied with Russian masters in Moscow after graduating from Tbilisi Conservatory and now made his career there. Narimanidze remarked that Georgia, too, ought to send its talented up-and-comers for training in Moscow, as Armenia had. Finally, Aleksandr Gaiamov, a Turkmen musicologist who had followed the same pipeline to Moscow waxed poetic about the trio’s duty as builders of Armenian music. Echoing the general reverence for Russian expertise, he intoned, “We know very well that, having come to Moscow, these composers must obtain great mastery and become capable of broadening the boundaries of national style... We know these bounds must be broadened while always remaining national Soviet Armenian musical culture.”³⁷

The message for Khudoian, Arutiunian, and Mirzoian was clear and consistent: Russians, as the “first among equals,” had attained a level of musical sophistication of which national minorities could as yet only dream. The path forward lay through study in Russian-dominated Moscow, after which their duty was to serve their nationality by creating sophisticated musical works identifiably derived from their national idiom. They must become, in Gaiamov’s phrase, “national Soviet Armenian” composers—not just Soviet ones. To be sure, Ter-Gabrielian, Narimanidze, and Gaiamov had a vested interest in affirming their own choices. But for the younger generation, their success served as proof of concept. This would be further reinforced by their own victories, including Arutiunian’s receipt of a first class Stalin Prize for his graduation piece, *Cantata of the Motherland*, two years later.³⁸

Georgian composer Sulkhan Tsintsadze received a similar message during several presentations to the Symphony and Chamber Music Section between 1949 and 1951. Narimanidze had wished for a Georgian aspirant to match the three Armenians, and in Tsintsadze he found his man. Twenty years Narimanidze’s junior, Tsintsadze had studied cello at Tbilisi Conservatory and performed professionally before enrolling at Moscow State Conservatory in 1946. Beginning his compositional career in Moscow during the *zhdanovshchina* proved a savvy move. Even before graduation, Tsintsadze attracted favorable attention in the Composers’ Union, and in 1950, while still enrolled, he was awarded a Stalin Prize for his Second String Quartet.³⁹ While a third class prize was not especially valued, it was still a major achievement for a student. Tsintsadze’s success, like Arutiunian’s, points to two important factors. First, the late Stalinist state had a strong desire to reward minority composers in keeping with the Friendship of the Peoples framework, and the scarcity of qualified competitors kept the odds of winning high. Second, the formula for obtaining such a prize included not only ambition and talent, but prominent use of one’s national music, preferably in a manner that demonstrated innovation without compromising its recognizable folk basis.

³⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.171, l.50

³⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.208, l.9

³⁸ Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize*, pp. 319. See chapter 7 for a discussion of Stalin Prizes awarded to national minorities.

³⁹ Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize*, p. 321.

Tsintsadze first learned this in May 1949, when he brought his soon-to-be prize winning quartet to the Composers' Union, along with two viola pieces, one of which was an arrangement of the *khorumi* (a traditional Georgian dance), and two salon romance settings of Pushkin's poetry. The meeting's participants ignored the Pushkin romances in favor of the other works, which were built more directly on Georgian elements. Like his Armenian colleagues, Tsintsadze received praise specifically as a minority composer. Litinskii remarked that he and Vladimir Fere had recently visited Georgia to listen to new compositions and been impressed; however, "comparing Tsintsadze's talent with that of other Georgian composers," Tsintsadze easily triumphed.⁴⁰ Litinskii thus automatically placed Tsintsadze in a category with other Georgians, rather than, say, other Moscow Conservatory students, a group to which he belonged equally well and with which Litinskii was more familiar as a conservatory professor. Further, Fere noted that the quartet had already been performed at a concert devoted to Georgian composers.⁴¹ This was a rare opportunity for an early-career composer, and an extra incentive for Tsintsadze to embrace the musical community's desire to see him first and foremost as Georgian by composing music that fit the bill.

The pieces Tsintsadze auditioned in 1949 did that and more by conforming to the demands of musical Socialist Realism. In fact, speakers consistently asserted a causal relationship between his use of Georgian intonations and positive Socialist Realist characteristics like "vitality, realism, concreteness, and attractive musical images." Tsintsadze's works were not only life-affirming *and* folk-inflected; they were life-affirming *because* they were folk-inflected. As composer Vladimir Iurovskii asserted, "Tsintsadze's music is closely connected with the intonation of his native people, and *for this reason* his work produces a bright and triumphant impression."⁴² Indeed, Tsintsadze seemed to have worked a musical magic similar to Rimsky-Korsakov's use of the whole-tone scale, creating a sound that was delightfully unusual while conforming to dominant aesthetics. Of course, speakers cautioned Tsintsadze that he still had much to learn from the Russian classics—and his Russian contemporaries. Litinskii advised him to study Glinka and Taneev, while a musicologist recommended Tchaikovsky, and Iurovskii sagely remarked, "If he listens to our criticism and truly appreciates it, he will become a great master."⁴³ But it seemed Tsintsadze had understood what was expected of him as a minority Soviet composer.

Tsintsadze's quartet received the lion's share of attention, which was hardly incidental. Simply by being a quartet, a complex form, it fulfilled the state's modernizing mission more surely than the simpler viola pieces or Russified romances. Further, Tsintsadze's employment of lively and "exotic" Georgian folk melodies made the work accessible while maintaining its complexity. Fere noted approvingly that at the Georgian concert, the quartet had proved popular even with workers—an unusual feat for chamber music.⁴⁴ Yet, these qualities were not quite enough to satisfy the official demands of modernization. Another speaker summarized what was missing. After praising Tsintsadze's

⁴⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.173

⁴¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.187

⁴² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, ll.179, 187. Emphasis mine.

⁴³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.179

⁴⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.187

folk intonations, he mused, “You don’t sense that this is original. You only sense Georgian national music that doesn’t go beyond boundaries.”⁴⁵ In order to take his place among the rising national minority music stars, Tsintsadze would have to go further, not only incorporating Georgian folk material into complex forms, but becoming a musical innovator without sacrificing his folk-inflected accessibility.

As he continued his studies under Russian masters, Tsintsadze became more attuned to the balance required. Two years later, he auditioned his Third String Quartet for the Symphony and Chamber Music Section. Once again, speakers connected his use of Georgian intonations to positive Socialist Realist qualities like contemporaneity, freshness, and accessibility. And in a sign of his advancing abilities, they now also praised him for integrating 19th-century Russian compositional practice into his work. As Ogolevets remarked,

“This is the type of national color, of national music, which will win the recognition of the broad masses of the Soviet Union. It stands on national soil and develops the treasures of folk melody in synthesis with the great achievements of Russian culture. This is what we’ve been waiting for from the composers of our national republics.”⁴⁶

Ogolevets’ framing is significant. He asserts that, in combining recognizable elements of both Georgian folk and Russian classical traditions, Tsintsadze has created something uniquely Soviet, which could only have been made by a minority composer. Indeed, for him, Tsintsadze’s quartet served as an ideal musical enactment of the Friendship of the Peoples and the postwar ideal of Soviet progress driven by Russian-led diversity. Moreover, Ogolevets declares it the duty of minority composers to develop this particular musical style—to do what Russian composers could not, because to build on the 19th-century Russian national school using Russian intonations would add nothing new. While Russians’ national expression was encouraged, their normative position within the family of Soviet nations rendered them capable of demonstrating leadership, but not integration. By writing minority folk-inflected, Socialist Realist music, then, Tsintsadze had defined himself as not merely a Georgian composer or a Soviet one, but as a Soviet Georgian composer, and in the process, advanced the cause of Soviet music.

Interestingly, this step away from a purely Georgian sound generated friction with Narimanidze. Though he had previously wished for a Georgian equivalent of the Armenian aspirants, Narimanidze now criticized the direction Tsintsadze’s music was taking. He allowed that the quartet’s fourth movement, built on another traditional dance, the *lezginka*, was quite Georgian, but the rest “Doesn’t give me the same feeling I get when I listen to my national music. If I’d left early... I would have said this is not Georgian.”⁴⁷ He allowed that the inner movements were well-constructed, and on the whole the Third Quartet was an improvement on the Second. But as an expert on Georgian music—note his use of the possessive “my”—he pronounced the quartet wanting in this regard. Whether he felt threatened or simply wanted to assert his authority over the young up-and-comer, Narimanidze emphasized that Tsintsadze would do well not to stray too far from use of Georgian intonations, the quality that made him valuable as a Soviet composer.

⁴⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.361, l.183

⁴⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, l.13

⁴⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, l.16

Here, however, Narimanidze overplayed his hand. His remarks drew a swift backlash from his Russian colleagues. Tamara Livanova perfunctorily acknowledged that she was not a specialist in Georgian music like Narimanidze. But she was an “accustomed” listener who had frequently taken part in auditioning Georgian music at the Composers’ Union, and to her ear, Tsintsadze’s quartet was “brightly national... self-contained but not closed-in... A free development on a Georgian base of what composers have built, including the Russian classics... I can’t judge which themes are Georgian, but they sound naturally developed.”⁴⁸ As far as Livanova was concerned, Narimanidze might be right that Tsintsadze’s quartet lacked genuine Georgian themes, but that was immaterial. What mattered was that it *sounded* Georgian to her, a leading (Russian) Soviet musicologist—and not only Georgian, but also Romantic, and through this combination, ideally Soviet.

Livanova’s assertion of the Friendship of the Peoples framework was supported by other minority composers. Notably, Vano Muradeli complimented Tsintsadze on the originality of his music, a quality he had apparently improved, as well as its national sound. He explained,

“It’s national not in the narrowly localistic sense [*uzkomestnicheski*], but in the broad Soviet meaning of the word. This is a national work in which the deep roots of Georgian music are preserved. To develop his national art, the author united the achievements of the great Russian classics and those of our brother republics...

For that reason, this work sounds deeply national, deeply Soviet. It’s broadly accessible to the many peoples of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁹

This issue was of special concern to Muradeli, as a Georgian and the composer of *The Great Friendship*, the opera that had been condemned in the Central Committee’s 1948 resolution on music. Muradeli had weathered that crisis and would be awarded a second class Stalin Prize later that year.⁵⁰ Here, perhaps partly as an affirmation that he had learned his lesson, Muradeli asserted both his understanding of the formula for late Stalinist minority music and his ability to recognize Tsintsadze’s employment of it. As one Soviet Georgian to another, he congratulated his junior colleague on expressing the national and political identity they shared in music.

Muradeli was not alone. Moisei Weinberg, a composer with Jewish nationality, seconded Livanova, remarking that though he, too, was not a specialist in Georgian music, “Such bright themes can only be national.”⁵¹ Weinberg was followed by Aram Khachaturian, an Armenian raised in Georgia and one of the giants of Soviet minority music. Like Muradeli, Khachaturian had been denounced in the Central Committee resolution as a “formalist” and marked his rehabilitation with a Stalin Prize.⁵² Perhaps for similar reasons to Muradeli’s, he now stated firmly that he disagreed with Narimanidze and considered Tsintsadze’s work exemplary for the younger generation of national composers. Further, he highlighted Tsintsadze’s originality, noting approvingly that the quartet’s melodic material was not directly quoted from the folk repertoire. Rather, “These are melodies and themes from Tsintsadze himself, but they’re unquestionably Georgian. This is how he

⁴⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, l.17

⁴⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, ll.4-5

⁵⁰ Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize*, p. 232-234, 324

⁵¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, l.21

⁵² Frolova-Walker, *Stalin’s Music Prize*, p. 149-151, 323

translates national color through himself.”⁵³ Thus, a rather remarkable scene emerged: with the Caucasian composers split, the meeting’s other participants effectively asserted their right to declare a winner. And though they admitted they knew relatively little about Georgian music—only Ogolevets claimed expertise—they dismissed such knowledge as unnecessary. The important thing, from their perspective, was that the quartet fit their preconceptions of what Georgian music ought to sound like. With Muradeli and Khachatryan ranged against him, Narimanidze could not hold his own, even in regard to the national music he had spent his career developing.

With the exception of Narimanidze, then, the meeting’s participants agreed that Tsintsadze had taken a step forward, both for himself and for the collective project of creating a distinctive Soviet repertoire. As a minority composer, he had appropriately embraced his national music, making it the basis of his compositional style. What’s more, having studied at Moscow State Conservatory and become a regular presenter at the Composers’ Union, he had imbibed the legacy of the Russian classics and responded to his colleagues’ commentary. And as the final piece in the puzzle, he had found a way to incorporate his own voice, creating a work that was Georgian, Soviet, and entirely his own. Tsintsadze, it seemed, was well on his way to success.

Restriction to the National Form

While Soviet nationalities policy created many opportunities for aspiring minority composers, it foreclosed on others. Chief among these was the opportunity to transcend minority status. In other words, if we return to Gaiamov’s formula praising Arutiunian, Mirzoian, and Khudoian as creators of “national Soviet Armenian” music, minority composers found that they were not at liberty to emphasize the “Soviet” over the “national,” let alone to jettison the “national” entirely, as only Russians could do during late Stalinism.

Tsintsadze learned this lesson when he auditioned his first piano concerto at the Composers’ Union in June 1950. As always, speakers praised him for his distinctive national sound while placing him squarely within a Georgian frame. Musicologist Israel Nest’ev compared the piece favorably to a recent concerto by another Georgian, Aleksei Machavariani, and praised Tsintsadze’s ability to adapt folk themes for use in complex instrumental forms.⁵⁴ Similarly, musicologist Vladimir Kukharskii remarked that the concerto “wins you over with its real, very deep, original folk character. It stands out from concerti previously written by Georgians. He doesn’t try to write in folk language; rather, it comes out of him that way. It’s his essence.”⁵⁵ As Kukharskii’s naturalistic language indicates, Tsintsadze had once again proven his value to the Soviet minority musical project by producing a superior work that sounded effortlessly and essentially Georgian.

Yet, as the discussion continued, it became clear that Tsintsadze had not quite found the right balance. Though all praised the concerto’s folk intonations, the performer who had demonstrated it, one Domashevskaya, expressed concern that “parts are not en-

⁵³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.604, l.25

⁵⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.467, l.38

⁵⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.467, l.41

tirely pianistic. The instrument is used rather little.”⁵⁶ Others agreed, including Zarui Apetian, a musicologist and censor who added a slight but significant twist. Apetian was also Georgian—a member of the same cohort as Machavariani, Muradeli, and Nari-manidze—and thus had a strong interest in developing high-quality Soviet Georgian classical music. With this in mind, she noted approvingly that, “Tsintsadze’s use of Europeanized piano technique doesn’t conflict with the specific Georgian character of the thematic material.”⁵⁷ But she worried that his style was reminiscent of Moritz Moszkowski, a late 19th-century Polish-German composer known for his lightweight showpieces. For Apetian, the problem was less that Tsintsadze did not use the piano enough, than that he did not use it in a sophisticated manner, relying on empty virtuosity rather than mining the instrument’s expressive capabilities.

Composer Vladimir Vlasov, a Russian who made his career developing Soviet Kyrgyz classical music, summed up this sentiment. “It seems to me,” he opined,

“That in a piece so brightly folk-like, which can claim its own resolution of the concerto [form], it wouldn’t be so bad to think less about virtuosity... Wouldn’t it be worth augmenting the texture? In such interesting music, we can allow a different treatment of the piano, with more musical content and fewer virtuosic passages... You should consider how to revise the piano part to more broadly and deeply convey big ideas.”⁵⁸

Here, Vlasov, a Russian elder statesman of national minority music, brought together Domashevskaiia’s and Apetian’s concerns that Tsintsadze’s concerto convey depth of meaning while employing the piano’s full capabilities. But his proposed solution, that Tsintsadze enhance the musical texture and range of pianistic technique while trimming the virtuosity but without diminishing the characteristic Georgian intonations, was far from easy to implement.

Still, Tsintsadze set to work, and a year later, in May 1951, he presented a new version at the Composers’ Union. The meeting got off to a promising start. The first speaker praised Tsintsadze for continuing to develop his compositional skill after winning a Stalin Prize, and remarked that when listening to his folk-inflected works, “you involuntarily feel a connection to the creativity of the best classics.”⁵⁹ Of course, the “classic” she had in mind was Georgian composer Zacharia Paliashvili, a comparison that kept Tsintsadze within the framework of minority music. Even so, she declared the new version a major improvement, which exhibited greater maturity and fuller use of the piano.

Unfortunately, this assessment was far from universal. Speaking next, composer Iurii Levitin returned to the twin issues of texture and virtuosity. Expressing the majority opinion, he declared that Tsintsadze’s concerto lacked the “nobility of style in the sense of texture” evident in his compositions for strings. As a cellist eager to prove his piano bona fides, Tsintsadze had overloaded the piece with unnecessary ornamentation. Levitin railed, “He’s convinced that if you write for the piano, you must at all costs play with the

⁵⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.467, l.38. The transcript identifies Domashevskaiia as the performer of a violin romance. However, her reference to pianism and avowal that she enjoyed learning “this piece,” indicate that she performed the concerto.

⁵⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.467, l.40.

⁵⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.467, ll.42-43.

⁵⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.605, l.44

whole palm and all fingers must be busy... the music falls victim to the texture, which is not even pianistic, but pseudo-pianistic.”⁶⁰ Worse, it still lacked substance. If one were to clear away the rococo excess, which interrupted the melodic line and took the pianist up and down the keyboard to no avail, there would be scarcely five minutes of music left.

Warming to his topic, Levitin addressed the root of Tsintsadze’s compositional error. He intoned,

“Tsintsadze is on the wrong path. He set himself the task of creating a virtuosic piece... [not] simply good music... He brought in a completely *foreign* texture, the accessory of old-fashioned pieces, which harms the material. The music has a real national color, but it doesn’t help to bring in such heavy artillery, which it doesn’t need.”⁶¹

Levitin generalized his remarks by concluding that “our composers” would do well to avoid such “old-fashioned” excesses. But in pointing specifically to the “national color” of Tsintsadze’s concerto and characterizing his heavy texture as “foreign,” he set this technique in opposition to the “natural” Georgian essence for which Kukharskii had praised the first version. Musicologist Sergei Skrebkov made this point even more explicit, affirming, “Where the virtuosic passages begin, there is a break from national form, and a feeling arises of some foreignness of the material... Tsintsadze would do well to follow the correct path of developing his national personality.”⁶² In other words, one might disapprove of virtuosic ornamentation in general, but it was particularly troubling to see a minority composer employ it. To do so was to enter into higher-level debates about Soviet pianism and potentially join the front ranks of all-Union composition—and in so doing, to step away from the explicitly national.

Indeed, even Khachaturian confirmed this assessment, in his role as a senior Caucasian composer who had built a successful career on playing by the rules of national minority music. Two months prior, during the discussion of Tsintsadze’s Third Quartet, Khachaturian had declared his music an exemplar of the happy medium between folk-inflection and originality. Now, while still praising these qualities, he nevertheless agreed that the new version of the concerto had crossed over into excess complexity. He advised Tsintsadze to have done with “*kotlety*” (dense chordal technique) and “give something of your own”—presumably something more recognizably Georgian.⁶³ He concluded with a friendly admonition to listen to his colleagues’ criticism and draw the correct conclusions.

In his response, Tsintsadze thanked those assembled, but proposed writing a new concerto rather than revising a second time. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how he could have completed such a revision to his interlocutors’ satisfaction. The second version had been judged overly complex, yet to simplify the texture and ornamentation would be essentially to return to the first version, which had been judged not complex enough. Locating the appropriate midpoint between these two poles would be difficult at best. Rather, Tsintsadze understood that he would do better to start over, keeping in mind the central lesson of his concerto’s adventure: as a national minority composer, his value to the Sovi-

⁶⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d. 605, ll.47-48

⁶¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.605, ll.48-49, emphasis mine.

⁶² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.605, l.54

⁶³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.60. My thanks to Marina Frolova-Walker for her help in elucidating the musical *kotleta*.

et project lay in composing original music that rested on a rich, recognizable folk base and exhibited enough sophistication to demonstrate how far Georgian music had come under Soviet power and Russian leadership. Yet, he must not take such sophisticated, “foreign” methods too far. Complex textures and virtuosic ornamentation were a matter for Russians, the most musically “advanced” Soviet nation and the only one to which an unalloyed Soviet identity was available.

The interrelated issues of folk-inflection, originality, and sophistication similarly came into play during the Symphony and Chamber Music Section’s discussion of Moisei Weinberg’s *Sinfonietta*. Weinberg’s situation was complicated by the fact that, as a Jew, he belonged to a minority that presented a unique case within Soviet nationalities policy. Jews, like Gypsies, were non-territorial; the attempt to create a Jewish Autonomous Region in the far eastern territory of Birobidzhan failed to attract adherents, and most Soviet Jews continued to live in the RSFSR and western republics.⁶⁴ What’s more, Jews were no strangers to Western-style classical music. They had played a major role in the Imperial Russian scene, from Anton and Nikolai Rubinstein, who founded the St. Petersburg and Moscow Conservatories, to Maximilian Steinberg, son-in-law and musical heir of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who educated the first generation of Soviet composers. And they remained prominent in Soviet classical music after 1917.⁶⁵ Thus, unlike other minorities, Jews did not appear to be in need of Soviet cultural construction. Rather, since the 1920s Soviet Jewish composers had, like Russians, treated incorporation of their folk music into new works as an option, not a requirement.

The *zhdanovshchina* changed this calculus, particularly for Weinberg, who brought his *Sinfonietta* to the Composers Union just three months after the Central Committee’s 1948 resolution on music. The resolution’s demand that minority composers make use of their national music, as well as its condemnation of musical “formalism” and Western influence, were of special concern to Weinberg, as a Jew who had not previously employed Jewish folk motifs and a child of interwar Poland who had studied composition in Warsaw before escaping to the Soviet Union during WWII. Weinberg’s compositional style was not overtly modernist, but neither did it fully conform to Socialist Realism. At the September 1946 Composers’ Union Plenum, held in the wake of the first three *zhdanovshchina* resolutions, Khachaturian, then the Union’s head, advised Weinberg to adopt a more national and realistic style. This warning was compounded in 1948 when Dmitrii Shostakovich, with whom Weinberg had developed a close creative friendship, was named as a leading “formalist” in the resolution on music, and four of Weinberg’s own pieces were included on the list of banned works. Weinberg’s wife, Natalia, later claimed he wrote the *Sinfonietta* in response to these events.⁶⁶

Adding another layer of complexity, Natalia was the daughter of Solomon Mikhoels, famed director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater and chair of the Jewish Anti-

⁶⁴ On Birobidzhan, see Weinberg. *Stalin’s Forgotten Zion*. In using the term “Gypsy,” I follow Brigid O’Keeffe. See O’Keeffe, “A Note on Terminology,” *New Soviet Gypsies*, unpaginated. Soviet Jews and Gypsies were both associated with musicality, but while Gypsies often foregrounded their alterity in their professional identities, Jews did not.

⁶⁵ See Sargeant. *Harmony and Discord*. Steinberg converted to Orthodoxy when he married Nadezhda Rimaskaia-Korsakova.

⁶⁶ On compositional style, see Fanning, *Mieczysław Weinberg: In Search of Freedom*, pp. 40-71. Fanning quotes Natalia Vovsi-Mikhoels on p. 63.

Fascist Committee, who was assassinated in a staged traffic accident in January 1948. Though his death was believed accidental and the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign was still a year off, the rising tide of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was already palpable.⁶⁷ It was in this context that Weinberg employed a quotation from Mikhoels as the *Sinfonietta*'s epigraph: "In the collective farm fields Jewish songs resounded, not the song of the past, full of melancholy and idleness, but new, joyous songs of creativity and labor."⁶⁸ Amidst the *zhdanovshchina* and an increasingly hostile climate, Weinberg needed the *Sinfonietta* to prove his worthiness as a citizen and a Soviet Jewish composer.

The discussion started off well, with Iurovskii praising the *Sinfonietta*'s originality, realism, and grounding in folk music. "The music is built on Jewish national melodism," he declared confidently. "I'm not very strong in the melodism of this people, though I'm a representative of it, but judging by the score and music, it's original, very programmatic... [and] optimistic."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the next two speakers, both prominent Jewish composers in their own right, took opposite positions. Mikhail Gnesin agreed with Iurovskii, praising the work's "national folk elements" and "laconicism."⁷⁰ But Grigorii Krein declared, "I absolutely, definitely, sincerely, and heartily do not like this work! It gives me a feeling of deepest indignation and outrage. And for all my desire to instruct him, I just don't know." Krein allowed that the themes could perhaps be Jewish, but Weinberg had set them with "Mendelssohn-ish harmonies so primitive and foreign that it's really unpleasant."⁷¹ Indeed, Krein's accusations foreshadowed those that would be raised against the second version of Tsintsadze's piano concerto, with Mendelssohn taking the place of Moszkowski as the exemplar of show without substance. Such concerns reveal that the *Sinfonietta* now had to be discussed within the framework of Soviet nationalities policy, while Krein's tantrum reflected the general anxiety of the *zhdanovshchina*.

Some speakers viewed this conflict through the lens of the *zhdanovshchina*. One young composer, alarmed by the stark conflict between Gnesin and Krein, asked for clarification, because he, too, aspired to write "Jewish music" and wished to avoid such mistakes. Obliquely referencing the Central Committee resolution he persisted, "Insofar as our meetings must now be different and teach us something, I just want to ask."⁷² Another opined, "I find this work a very honest answer to recent events. It shows that Weinberg created a work with a distinct idea, with a melodic basis, which he didn't have as much of before."⁷³ Others agreed. For these discussants, the important question was whether Weinberg had successfully modified his methods, embracing folk-inflection and discarding "formalism." In doing so even incompletely, he would demonstrate the willingness and ability of the Soviet musical community to follow the Central Committee's directives.

But for the majority, the real issue was not *whether* Weinberg had incorporated Jewish themes, but *how* he had done so. One Polonskii raised this question directly, but

⁶⁷ On Mikhoels' death and rising anti-Semitism, see Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows*. On the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in music, see Tomoff, *Creative Union*, pp. 152-188.

⁶⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.23 (read out by Shekhter)

⁶⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.15ob-16

⁷⁰ RGALI, f.962, op.5, d.1033, l.122. This page is missing from the Composers' Union's stenograph but exists in the Committee on Arts Affairs' version.

⁷¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.16-16ob

⁷² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.16ob

⁷³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.20

did not venture to answer it. He merely suggested that “Each artist has the right to present themes close to his people as he feels it, through the prism of his interpretation,” and asked Gnesin and Krein to elaborate on their positions.⁷⁴ Both demurred, but not for long. Gnesin remarked that when he and Krein had written works on Jewish themes in the past, someone had always been dissatisfied. “I don’t know,” replied Krein facetiously, “I like your work better than this.”⁷⁵ Annoyed, Gnesin tried again, noting pointedly that in the old days, they had been influenced by Scriabin and their music was “static,” whereas Weinberg’s had a sense of motion. Unimpressed, Krein countered that even then there had been “dilettantes” who relied on “Mendelssohn-ish elements.” Finally, Gnesin threw up his hands, declaring, “If you listen attentively, you will naturally be convinced that... the melody is clearly perceptible and there’s nothing foreign.” It seemed the two giants of Soviet Jewish music were at an impasse.

Perhaps attempting to break the stalemate, composer Israel Kan suggested that the *Sinfonietta*’s themes were not Jewish at all, but rather “Eastern (Azerbaijani and such).” But Polonskii quickly shot him down, announcing that he could “affirm with full responsibility” that the harmonic structure certainly was Jewish.⁷⁶ Musicologist Semen Shlifshtein backed him, noting that while he, like Iurovskii, was not an expert, he was a Jew, and Jews always know their own music. This was an odd claim, given that Kan, too, was Jewish but apparently lacked this ethno-musical sixth sense. Nevertheless, it effectively silenced Kan and moved the discussion back to Weinberg’s approach to setting his apparently Jewish themes.⁷⁷

Finally, the discussion turned in Weinberg’s favor. Shlifshtein praised his new-found musical realism, in pointed disagreement with Krein. Weinberg’s methods were different from Krein’s, he remarked, and Krein was “one of those musicians who can’t see beyond his own yardstick and doesn’t want to, either.”⁷⁸ Composer Aleksandr Vepruk took this further, opining that it was unfair to criticize Weinberg for taking a more modern approach than his elders. What’s more, if the *Sinfonietta* had a “Mendelssohn-ish” quality, “I see nothing bad in that; Mendelssohn was a Jew and his influence is entirely natural.”⁷⁹ Rather, Weinberg had innovated by writing new melodies using Jewish intonations, rather than quoting Jewish folksongs directly, which resulted in a piece that sounded original and Jewish while avoiding uncomfortable religious associations. This approach, he observed, was similar to Glinka’s in his landmark opera *Ivan Susanin*. Vepruk’s speech was extremely clever. In one fell swoop, he neutralized Krein’s Mendelssohn complaint by bringing Mendelssohn into the sphere of Jewish composers and making him an emblem of national musical pride, while also associating Weinberg with Glinka, the father of Russian musical nationalism. Further, he highlighted the Jewish sound, originality, and complexity of Weinberg’s work, thus affirming the *Sinfonietta*’s value on all fronts.

The specter of the *zhdanovshchina* haunted the meeting’s final exchanges. Conductor Sergei Gorchakov alleged that Krein had essentially accused Weinberg of mocking

⁷⁴ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.17

⁷⁵ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.17ob-18 (full exchange)

⁷⁶ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.18-18ob

⁷⁷ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.18ob-19

⁷⁸ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.18ob-19ob

⁷⁹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.20ob-21

Jewish music by creating the image of “a Jew in frock coat and *peyes*.”⁸⁰ At this, Gnesin shouted exasperatedly, “One says it’s a Jew in a frock coat and *peyes*, another says there’s nothing Jewish!” Of course Weinberg’s music was Jewish, he continued, and of course it was created with love, not irony. Hinting at the source of his anger, he concluded, “I, too, have been reproached for ‘jeering’ at the Jews.”⁸¹ Now it was Krein’s turn to calm his colleague by assuring him that no one was accusing Weinberg of mockery. Rather, the issue was the impression his music left with listeners—particularly, he implied, those on the Central Committee. Closing the meeting, Boris Shekhter, too, referenced the resolution on music, noting that, “We’re all now uncommonly concerned about our further creative path.” He praised Weinberg for his originality, realism, and turn toward Jewish music, though he cautioned that his new style lacked sufficient complexity to express “a great idea... the idea of creativity and labor.”⁸² He voiced certainty that Weinberg would soon conquer this challenge.

Yet, Weinberg’s articulation of a “great idea” was by no means the heart of this discussion. Rather, the spectacle of a group of Jewish composers—ten out of twelve speakers were Jewish, a statistic hardly possible in Moscow for any other non-Russian nationality—heatedly debating whether their colleague’s work was Jewish at all, or Jewish enough, or Jewish in the right way, sat squarely at center stage. Through their deliberations, a clear theme emerged: in the wake of the Central Committee resolution, it was essential that Jewish composers foreground their nationality. Qualities like originality and complexity would henceforth be assessed in relation to this primary characteristic. It was for this reason that neither Kan’s “Eastern” suggestion nor Shekhter’s attempt to frame the discussion around Soviet composers’ general response to the resolution gained traction. In the context of the *zhdanovshchina*, composers like Weinberg were no longer simply Soviet. Rather, they had become “national Soviet Jewish” composers and were bound by this stricture as thoroughly as Arutiunian or Tsintsadze.

Conclusion

In its essence, Soviet nationalities policy sought to liberate Imperial Russia’s minority nations from colonial oppression and endow them with a new identity as equal participants in the multiethnic workers’ state. Under the Stalinist rubric of the Friendship of the Peoples, their unique national characteristics were to be celebrated through cultural production, even as modernization imbued their works with sophisticated socialist content. Music was an ideal genre for showcasing the achievements of Soviet nationalities policy. Within twenty years of the revolution, Soviet officials could point to the opera houses springing up in republican capitals, performing national operas composed with help from Russian “guests.” More significantly, they could also point to the new republican conservatories, training cohorts of minority composers to incorporate folk material into complex Western forms.

⁸⁰ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.21. *Peyes* is the Yiddish term for the curled side locks worn by Hasidic Jewish men. Gorchakov may have perceived Krein’s remarks as a dig at Weinberg’s Polish origins. While Weinberg hailed from the assimilated milieu of Warsaw, many provincial Polish Jews still wore traditional attire.

⁸¹ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, l.22

⁸² RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.265, ll.22ob-23

The late Stalinist era proved a uniquely productive moment for Soviet nationalities policy in music. The Friendship of the Peoples framework was at its height, augmented by the wartime myth of Soviet strength built by a diverse family of nations working together under Russian leadership. Further, the end of WWII coincided with the rise of a new generation of minority composers, primarily from the Caucasus, the first raised entirely under Soviet power, who were eager to make a name for themselves composing music “national in form, socialist in content.” Their existence served as proof that nationalities policy was bearing fruit. And the external situation rendered their emergence more significant still. With decolonization struggles on the rise and the Cold War setting in, it was more important than ever to demonstrate the benefits Soviet socialism could bring to emerging nations, in part through music.

The *zhdanovshchina* strongly impacted this musical development. The Central Committee’s 1946 resolutions on literature, theater, and film imposed renewed strictures and brought Cold War rhetoric home to the creative intelligentsia by denouncing specific cultural producers for defamation of Soviet life and fascination with the West. Further, its 1948 resolution on music, which criticized Muradeli for neglecting to use Georgian folk melodies in his opera *The Great Friendship*, dovetailed the *zhdanovshchina* with Soviet nationalities policy. These resolutions left no doubt that in order to please an increasingly vigilant state, minority composers would have to bring folk intonations into their music more prominently than ever.

It was in this overdetermined context that the first generation of ambitious, young Soviet minority composers brought their new works for discussion at the Composers’ Union in Moscow. As this article has demonstrated, Soviet nationalities policy created significant opportunities for minority aspirants like Aleksandr Arutiunian and Sulkhan Tsintsadze, who played by its rules. They bowed to its imagined national hierarchy by studying at their local conservatories, then coming to Moscow to complete their education under Russian masters. Further, they acceded to its musical dictates by infusing their compositions with recognizable folk elements, filtered through the lens of their individual creative personalities and placed within complex, yet accessible Western-style classical forms. Having stuck to the script, they found themselves welcomed in Moscow, awarded Stalin Prizes, and hailed as the future of Soviet national minority music.

At the same time, however, as this article has further demonstrated, Soviet nationalities policy placed significant limits on minority composers’ creativity. As Tsintsadze discovered with his piano concerto, while musical complexity was a priority, recognizable folk elements took precedence. Thick texture and virtuosic ornamentation were the province of those who could define themselves as Soviet composers, full stop. Tsintsadze, by contrast, could never transcend the bounds of his identity as a “national Soviet Georgian” composer. To attempt it was to challenge the hierarchical basis of Soviet nationalities policy and thereby forfeit its perks. Moisei Weinberg learned a similar lesson: in the heightened political atmosphere of late Stalinism, Jews were also required to conform to the “national Soviet minority” framework. In this new reality, Weinberg and his co-nationalists found themselves looking to other minorities to learn how to harness the benefits of Soviet nationalities policy without running up against its constraints.

In mid-1951, during a discussion at the Composers’ Union of a choral-orchestral work by Armenian composer Karen Khachaturian, Nikolai Peiko posed a rather peevish question. Though he liked the piece, he remarked, “Why is it that if a composer isn’t Rus-

sian but a representative of a brother republic, he must work on the basis of his republic's folk melodies, while a Russian can indulge or not, at will?"⁸³ His colleagues ignored him, and rightly so. Everyone knew the answer. Officially, Soviet nationalities policy had liberated composers like Karen Khachaturian from colonial oppression, bringing them the benefits of socialist modernization while valorizing their indigenous cultural expression. It was minority composers' duty to honor this commitment by embracing the "national Soviet minority" framework.

Composers who sought to move beyond this framework misunderstood the deal the Soviet state was offering. To push past the national sphere was to undermine the logic on which Soviet nationalities policy was built by demonstrating that folk-based musical expression was not an essential part of colonial liberation, and worse, that minority composers had nothing more to learn from Russians. In exchange for embracing their national identity and continuing to represent the benefits of Soviet power for former colonized peoples, the state lavished late Stalinist minority composers with opportunities and awards. But this framework turned out to be a gilded cage. Accepting the mantle of "national Soviet minority" composer brought many benefits, but came at the expense of the freedom to fully explore one's musical creativity.

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⁸³ RGALI, f.2077, op.1, d.605, l.123

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