

Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics, by Marina Frolova-Walker. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016. xi, 369 pp.

When it comes to the Stalin Prize many have taken its name literally, assuming it was granted directly by Stalin to his favorites in the arts and sciences. In an engaging and meticulously researched new book, *Stalin's Music Prize*, Marina Frolova-Walker thoroughly debunks that notion. In detailing the work of the Stalin Prize Committee (KSP), the group of creative artists that awarded the prizes, she demonstrates that it consistently engaged in genuine debate over nominees, foregrounded aesthetics over politics, and exercised substantial autonomy in its decisions. And while the KSP's recommendations were sometimes altered by higher governing bodies, this was most often done by the rival state and Party censorship agencies—the Committee for Arts Affairs and Agitprop—rather than by Stalin himself. In other words, while Stalin's opinion certainly mattered, his hand was barely in evidence in the awards process.

Frolova-Walker lays out her goals clearly. First, she seeks to bridge the divide between institutional histories and composers' biographies, in order to create an in-depth, "humaniz[ed]" (p. 6) picture of Soviet musical life between 1940 and 1954.¹ This she accomplishes handily, with chapters devoted variously to the KSP's functioning and to individual composers' prize trajectories. Frolova-Walker's theoretical approach also marks this monograph as a valuable addition to recent studies by Kiril Tomoff, Meri Herrala, Amy Nelson, and Jiří Smrž. These studies have upended the outdated Cold War model of composers and censors locked in battle, in order to paint a more nuanced picture of composers exercising agency within the censorship system.² She reveals the KSP as a locus of professional autonomy by establishing that its roster of creative masters worked with relatively little interference to reward high-quality works that conformed to their expert opinions on Socialist Realism.

1. Institutional histories include Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939–1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Simo Mikkonen, *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009); and Meri Elisabet Herrala, *The Struggle for Control of Soviet Music from 1932 to 1948: Socialist Realism vs. Western Formalism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012). Biographies include Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Kiril Tomoff's recent monograph *Virtuosi Abroad: Soviet Music and Imperial Competition during the Early Cold War, 1945–1958* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015) takes a similarly hybrid approach.

2. See Tomoff, *Creative Union*; Herrala, *Struggle for Control*; Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); and Jiří Smrž, *Symphonic Stalinism: Claiming Russian Musical Classics for the New Soviet Listener, 1932–1953* (Berlin: Lit, 2011).

Frolova-Walker also aims to dissolve the web of myths surrounding the Stalin Prize, which she does with a keen eye and brilliant wit. Chapter 2, for example, details the politicized and surprisingly chaotic process of determining the first round of prizes, granted in 1941. Here Frolova-Walker applies her impressive research skills to discrediting Solomon Volkov's claim that the unusual choice to award a first-class prize to Dmitry Shostakovich's Piano Quintet was made on Stalin's orders.³ Whereas Volkov's supposed smoking gun is a denunciatory letter sent by a disgruntled former arts official to Stalin, which he claims motivated Stalin's direct intervention, Frolova-Walker demonstrates that there is no evidence that Stalin read this letter, let alone that it influenced the chair of the Committee for Arts Affairs Mikhail Khrapchenko, who determined the final list of awards. Frolova-Walker admits that this version of events is not as "exciting" as Volkov's, before concluding wryly, "By way of compensation, it has the modest advantage of actually being supported by the evidence" (p. 61). Nearly every chapter includes such revelations.

The case of this letter reveals one of the frustrations of writing about Soviet music: the archival record is incomplete, leaving scholars to choose between running with a single document, as Volkov did, or building a narrative based as much on consideration of what is missing as on consideration of what is present. One of Frolova-Walker's strengths is her ability to apply comprehensive knowledge of behind-the-scenes relationships and looming political concerns to fill the gaps and bolster her analysis. Thus, for example, she paints a vivid picture of the emergence, after the Central Committee's 1948 denunciation of musical "formalists," of incoming head of the Composer's Union and the KSP Music Section Tikhon Khrennikov and Pyatnitsky Folk Choir director Vladimir Zakharov as an ideological tag team—a connection evident in their KSP commentary, but only if one is aware of it and therefore looks for it. Frolova-Walker is careful to acknowledge where sources are thin and her conclusions are thus based on inference. And at times she errs either on the side of caution, as in her less than satisfying discussion of whether Stalin or Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov played a greater role in the 1948 antiformalist campaign (pp. 222–28), or on the side of expansiveness, as in her psychologizing of Shostakovich's motivations as a KSP member (Chapter 5). But this is more than balanced by her subtle analysis of the way a former "proletarian" architect managed to shift the emphasis of one KSP discussion from aesthetic to ideological concerns by mobilizing a coded discourse so "full of the right phrases [that] his

3. Solomon Volkov, *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (London: Little, Brown, 2004), 165–66.

colleagues would have been reluctant to challenge it head on, however much they privately disdained it” (p. 99).

Frolova-Walker begins with an explanation of the KSP’s composition, structure, and bureaucratic position, alongside a poignant narrative of its members’ gradual progression from idealism to disillusionment as bureaucrats such as Khrennikov became increasingly dictatorial. Chapters 2, 10, and 11 serve as chronological bookends. Chapter 2 details the KSP’s chaotic first year, characterized by a lack of instructions, changing parameters, and intense aesthetic discussion, and reveals the machinations that led to the final list of music prizes differing substantially from the KSP’s recommendation. Chapter 10 picks up this thread with the Central Committee’s 1948 resolution “On the Opera *The Great Friendship*,” and focuses on the effects of the subsequent antiformalist campaign on the KSP (more on this below). Finally, Chapter 11 traces the KSP’s efforts to stay afloat after Stalin’s death. Frolova-Walker’s major contribution here is to reveal just how quickly the KSP began to de-Stalinize, turning against Socialist Realist norms and seeking to reward introspective works such as Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony.

The remaining central chapters fall into two thematic categories: composers’ experiences (Chapters 3–6) and types of awards (Chapters 7–9). In the former category Frolova-Walker explores the Stalin Prize histories of three giants of Soviet music. While it is no surprise that the first two are Prokofiev and Shostakovich, she sheds new light on their biographies. In the case of Prokofiev she demonstrates in Chapter 3 how closely his fortunes were tied to Khrapchenko, who first thwarted and then promoted the composer as the administrator became more involved in revisions to *War and Peace*. Turning to Shostakovich she reveals in Chapter 4 that his music served as a proxy for debating the balance between aesthetics and ideology in the KSP’s work—in other words, whether compositional mastery or conformity to Socialist Realism took precedence. Further, she establishes in Chapter 5 that while Shostakovich was a vocal, often tactless presence on the KSP he was not as powerful as has been supposed. In Chapter 6 Frolova-Walker focuses on Nikolai Myaskovsky, a composer who, though less well known in the West, was, she argues, a central figure in Soviet musical life. This somewhat diffuse but interesting chapter profiles Myaskovsky and three fellow composers—Aram Khachaturian, Dmitry Kabalevsky, and Vissarion Shebalin—all of whom had their careers shattered by the 1948 Central Committee resolution. As Frolova-Walker demonstrates, each composer’s work reveals different possibilities and dilemmas within Soviet music, serving to remind us not to limit our view to its two most famous contributors.

Turning to awards, Frolova-Walker begins in Chapter 7 with prizes granted to “national music” written by composers representing non-Russian Soviet republics. Following a helpful gloss on the Stalinist dictum to produce music that was “national in form, socialist in content,” a theme she has

explored before,⁴ Frolova-Walker reveals the Stalin Prize's significance as a means of rewarding "good" national efforts and bringing the Baltics into the Soviet fold. Moving to popular genres in Chapter 8, she highlights the KSP's snobbery, evident in its reticence to grant prizes to mass songs, jazz, and operettas, a position at odds with the populist bent of Socialist Realism. Finally, in Chapter 9 Frolova-Walker explores awards for performers and opera productions, again demonstrating that winning Stalin's favor did not necessarily translate into winning a Stalin Prize. She provides a fascinating view of the intense wrangling over Soviet operas—revisions of the classics as well as new works—which continues her previous research on this subject.⁵

Chapter 10 is a tour de force, filled with new insights about the 1948 antiformalist campaign. Not the least of these is that the campaign continued as long as it did because there was effectively no one to stop it: Khrapchenko fell victim to it and Zhdanov died six months in, leaving no one with sufficient authority to apply the brakes. Here Frolova-Walker performs another debunking, this time of the recent positive reappraisal of Khrennikov,⁶ demonstrating how, on the contrary, he used the antiformalist campaign to increase his own power. Stalin Prizes did become an avenue for rehabilitation, and the KSP even engaged in a modest rebellion by refusing to grant Khrennikov's opera *Frol Skobeev* a prize in 1950. Even so, considering Khrennikov's steep ascent Frolova-Walker asserts, "after Zhdanov's demise, the 1948 campaign was fully in Khrennikov's hands and . . . he was responsible for how long it lasted" (p. 257). Another highlight is Frolova-Walker's analysis of the KSP's search for an opera to promote in the wake of the denunciation of *The Great Friendship*. Short on options they settled on a high-profile but low-quality work, Herman Zhukovsky's *Heart and Soul*. Frolova-Walker uses this situation as a lens for viewing a moment of crisis in its many parts: the combination of bootstrapping and negligence that led to the opera's being awarded a prize in 1951; the KSP's humiliating forced revocation shortly thereafter; and the general demoralization following this meaningless yet damaging scandal. As Frolova-Walker summarizes, "The government this time was not trying to impress any significant ideological point on Soviet artists. Or perhaps the absence of a Zhdanov meant that no one could formulate any such point. After a while, everyone stopped trying to guess what the point might have been" (p. 251). The KSP limped along for another few years, but never recovered before its post-Stalin demise.

4. Marina Frolova-Walker, "'National in Form, Socialist in Content': Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics," this *Journal* 51 (1998): 331–71; Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

5. Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006): 181–216.

6. See, for example, A. I. Kokarev, ed., *Tikhon Nikolaevich Khrennikov: K 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia (stat'i i vospominaniia)* (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2013).

Frolova-Walker ends (“Conclusion”) with a concise discussion of musical Socialist Realism, a subject about which she is so perceptive that one wishes she had devoted a full chapter to it. Her radical claim is that “while scholars often describe Socialist Realism as an arbitrary power game and essentially an empty concept, the practice of the Stalin Prize awards allows us to see Socialist Realism within a coherent narrative framework, evolving slowly, never changing beyond recognition” (p. 292). In other words, while the official Soviet pronouncements that Western scholars have traditionally tried to decode are indeed hopelessly vague, they are also beside the point. Soviet composers approached this dilemma—as should we, Frolova-Walker asserts—by analyzing the canon of approved works and deriving from it a set of norms, including national coloring, popular idiom, and an optimistic program (even if only a “phantom” one, p. 281). The Stalin Prize played a major role in establishing that canon, and, as the author demonstrates, KSP members addressed these norms regularly in their deliberations, whether praising “core” works, debating “marginal” ones that did not fully conform but evinced artistic brilliance (as Prokofiev’s, Shostakovich’s, and Myaskovsky’s did), or discarding “unacceptable” ones (pp. 290–93). Frolova-Walker’s ability to identify these norms cements her case; this conclusion to her book will surely become standard reading for students of Soviet culture.

Frolova-Walker has conducted comprehensive research in state, Party, and theatrical archives, resulting in a thorough portrait of the Stalin Prize process and its role in shaping the late Stalinist musical landscape. Her conclusions convincingly upend much of the received wisdom concerning the balance between aesthetics and ideology in this period. What is more, her clear, intelligent, and humorous style ensures this book a broad readership among experts and amateurs alike. Concise chapters make it a good option for teaching, while its extensive indices are an excellent resource. *Stalin’s Music Prize* represents a milestone in the literature on Soviet music and cultural politics.

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Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq, by J. Martin Daughtry. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xi, 344 pp.

One distinctive feature of modernity is the proliferation of constructed sound, to the point where noise pollution is regarded as one of the greatest threats to human well-being. An ecology of violence invests the modern soundscape, encompassing the noise of industry, transport, and recreation. It is not simply organic damage but, insofar as the distinction remains viable, psychic damage. While this is especially true in situations of armed conflict,