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# САДРЖАЈ / CONTENTS

РЕЧ УРЕДНИКА / EDITOR'S FOREWORD  
9–15

ТЕМА БРОЈА / THE MAIN THEME  
МУЗИЧКА КРИТИКА У РУСИЈИ И ИСТОЧНОЈ ЕВРОПИ  
/ MUSIC CRITICISM IN RUSSIA AND EASTERN EUROPE

*Госћу уредник ИВАНА МЕДИЋ / Guest Editor IVANA MEDIĆ*

*Akvilë Stuart*

A SICK GENIUS? THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ALEXEI STANCHINSKY

*Аквиле Стјуарт*

БОЛЕСНИ ГЕНИЈЕ? КРИТИЧКА РЕЦЕПЦИЈА АЛЕКСЕЈА СТАНЧИЊСКОГ

19–33

*Svetlana Georgievna Zvereva*

RUSSIAN DRESDEN OF THE 1920s AND 1930s:

PROFILES OF MUSICAL, CHURCH AND SOCIAL LIFE

*Светлана Георгиевна Зверева*

РУССКИЙ ДРЕЗДЕН 1920-1930-х годов:

КОНТУРЫ МУЗЫКАЛЬНОЙ, ЦЕРКОВНОЙ И ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЙ ЖИЗНИ

35–56

*Daniel Elphick*

BORIS ASAFIEV AND SOVIET MUSICAL THOUGHT: REPUTATION AND  
INFLUENCE

*Данијел Елфик*

БОРИС АСАФЈЕВ И СОВЈЕТСКА МИСАО О МУЗИЦИ: УГЛЕД И УТИЦАЈ

57–74

*Stuart Campbell*  
THE RUSSIAN PARIS OF SERGEI RACHMANINOFF  
*Стюарт Кэмпбелл*  
РУССКИЙ ПАРИЖ С. В. РАХМАНИНОВА  
75–104

VARIA

*Ivana Vesić*  
CONTRIBUTION OF THE YUGOSLAV SOKOL ORGANIZATIONS  
TO THE INTERWAR SPHERE OF MUSIC  
*Ивана Весић*  
ДОПРИНОС ЈУГОСЛОВЕНСКИХ СОКОЛСКИХ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈА  
СФЕРИ МУЗИКЕ У МЕЂУРАТНОМ ПЕРИОДУ  
107–133

*Ivan Moody*  
WAYS OF LIVING ABROAD: THE FOREIGN COMPOSER IN BRITAIN AFTER  
WORLD WAR II  
*Иван Мууди*  
КАКО ЖИВЕТИ У ТУЂИНИ: ИНОСТРАНИ КОМПОЗИТОРИ У БЕЛИКОЈ  
БРИТАНИЈИ ПОСЛЕ ДРУГОГ СВЕТСКОГ РАТА  
135–147

*Jasna Jovičević*  
GENDER PERSPECTIVES OF INSTRUMENTAL JAZZ PERFORMERS IN  
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE  
*Јасна Јовићевић*  
РОДНЕ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ ЦЕЗ ИНСТРУМЕНТАЛИСТКИЊА У ЈУГОИСТОЧНОЈ  
ЕВРОПИ  
149–164

НАУЧНА КРИТИКА И ПОЛЕМИКА / SCIENTIFIC REVIEWS AND  
POLEMICS

**Марија Ђирић**

*На маргинама музиколошког канона. Композиторска генерација  
Петра Стојановића, Петра Крстића и Станислава Биничког.*  
Уредница Биљана Милановић. БЕОГРАД: МУЗИКОЛОШКО ДРУШТВО  
СРБИЈЕ И МУЗИКОЛОШКИ ИНСТИТУТ САНУ, 2019.

ISBN 978-86-80639-52-9

167–171

**Маја Рагивојевић**

ДИМИТРИЈЕ О. ГОЛЕМОВИЋ, ВЛАСИ: ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНА НАРОДНА  
МУЗИКА. MUZIKA VLANIOR DJIN LUMJE.  
НЕГОТИН: УДРУЖЕЊЕ ЗА ОЧУВАЊЕ ИДЕНТИТЕТА, ЈЕЗИКА, КУЛТУРЕ И  
ТРАДИЦИЈЕ ВЛАХА „ГЕРГИНА“, 2019.

ISBN 978-86-80602-08-0

173–175

**Лана Раџиќа**

*THE TUNES OF DIPLOMATIC NOTES. MUSIC AND DIPLOMACY IN SOUTHEAST  
EUROPE (18TH–20TH CENTURY).*

EDITED BY IVANA VESIĆ, VESNA PENO, BOŠTJAN UDVIČ.

БЕОГРАД И ЛЈУБЛЈАНА: ИНСТИТУТ ЗА МУЗИКОЛОГИЈУ, СРБИЈАН  
АКАДЕМИЈА НАУКА И УМЕТНОСТИ – УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ ЛЈУБЛЈАНА, ФАКУЛТЕТ  
ЗА СОЦИЈАЛНЕ НАУКЕ, 2020.

ISBN 978-86-80639-54-3

177–180

**Сања Грујић-Влајнић**

ИВАНА МЕДИЋ. ПАРАЛЕЛНЕ ИСТОРИЈЕ: САВРЕМЕНА СРПСКА УМЕТНИЧКА  
МУЗИКА У ДИЈАСПОРИ. БЕОГРАД: МУЗИКОЛОШКИ ИНСТИТУТ САНУ,  
2020.

ISBN 978-86-80639-44-4

181–184

**Ivan Moody**

*NOI ISTORII ALE MUZICILOR ROMÂNEȘTI. 2 VOLS:*

I. DE LA VECHI MANUSCRISE LA PRIODA MODERNĂ A MUZICII ROMÂNEȘTI;

II. IDEOLOGI, INSTITUȚII ȘI DIRECȚII COMONISTICE ÎN MUZICA  
ROMÂNEASCĂ DIN SECOLELE XX–XXI. Eds. VALENTINA SANDU-DEDIU  
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185–187

**Зорица Премаїе**

ДИСКОГРАФИЈА СРПСКЕ УМЕТНИЧКЕ МУЗИКЕ У 2020. ГОДИНИ  
189–195

IN MEMORIAM

**Милана Сїојадиновић-Милић**

ИСИДОРА ЖЕБЕЉАН

(БЕОГРАД, 27. СЕПТЕМБАР 1967 – БЕОГРАД, 29. СЕПТЕМБАР 2020)  
199–207

BORIS ASAFIEV AND SOVIET MUSICAL THOUGHT:  
REPUTATION AND INFLUENCE

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БОРИС АСАФЈЕВ И СОВЈЕТСКА МИСАО О МУЗИЦИ:  
УГЛЕД И УТИЦАЈ

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АБСТРАКТ

The theories of Boris Asafiev, including musical process, symphonism, and intonatsiya, proved to be hugely influential in the Soviet Union and beyond. While Asafiev's ideas were widely adopted by theorists and audiences alike, they were also appropriated by a generation of music critics. As composers struggled to come to terms with what might constitute socialist-realist music, critics built a discourse of projecting meaning onto works via Asafiev's theories. At the same time, multiple theorists developed and expanded his ideas. The picture that emerges is of a multitude of applications and responses to a multivalent body of work that became a vital part of musical discourse in the latter half of the Soviet Union. In this article, I survey the main theories from Boris Asafiev's writings on music, and their significance after his death. I begin by defining key terms such as symphonism, musical process, and especially intonatsiya. I then discuss the 1948 Zhdanovshchina and Asafiev's involvement, and the less well-known 1949 discussions on Musicology. For the remainder of the article, I provide examples of key studies from Soviet music theorists using Asafiev's terms to illustrate how their usage expanded and, in some cases, moved away from Asafiev's myriad intentions.

\* With thanks to Dr. Ivana Medić, and especially to the two anonymous reviewers of this article.

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KEYWORDS: Boris Asafiev, Soviet music, music theory, music criticism, music and Marxism.

#### АПСТРАКТ

Теорије Бориса Асафјева, укључујући оне о музичком процесу, симфонизму и интонацији, показале су се изузетно утицајнима у Совјетском Савезу и шире. Идеје Асафјева били су широко прихватили теоретичари и читаоци, али су их била присвојила и поколења музичких критичара. Док су се композитори борили да се помире с оним што би могло чинити соцреалистичку музику, критичари су изградили дискурс пројектовања значења на музичка дела преко Асафјевљевих теорија. У исто време, бројни теоретичари су развили и проширили његове идеје. У том смислу, настала слика представља мноштво примена и одзива на мултивалентни опус, који је постао витални део музичког дискурса у другој половини живота Совјетског Савеза. У овом чланку разматрам главне теорије Бориса Асафјева из његових радова о музици, као и значај који су имале после његове смрти. Почињем од дефинисања кључних појмова попут симфонизма, музичког процеса и, посебно, интонације. Затим расправљам о ждановизму из 1948. и уплетености Асафјева, као и о мање познатим дебатама о музикологији из 1949. године. У остатку рада износим примере кључних студија совјетских теоретичара музике који су користили Асафјевљеве термине, еда бих илустровао како је њихова употреба проширила интенције совјетског музиколога и како се, у неким случајевима, удаљила од великог броја тих интенција.

Кључне речи: Борис Асафјев, совјетска музика, теорија музике, музичка критика, музика и марксизам.

It is difficult to overemphasise the influence of Boris Asafiev (1884–1949) in Russian and Soviet music theory and criticism. Marina Frolova-Walker went so far as to claim that Asafiev's methods 'effectively saved instrumental music from marginalisation or even extinction in Stalin's Soviet Union' (Frolova-Walker 2013: 47). His writings on music were ground-breaking, including overviews of general music theory building on musico-philosophical ideas from Nietzsche, Bergson, and Yavorsky. Asafiev was industrious and successful, though his prolificacy sometimes occurred at the expense of clarity.



Peter J. Schmelz has argued (with exaggeration, but a kernel of truth), that the boundaries between Soviet musicologists and music critics were so ill-defined as to essentially be the same group of people (Schmelz 2019: 572).<sup>2</sup> Asafiev's theories accumulated over the course of decades of writing, and were utopian in their ambition, an aspect which appealed to a music press that was keen to demonstrate its political allegiances. Throughout the Soviet era, Asafiev's ideas and attitudes had been highly influential, but especially so in the 1940s. After his death, his influence only increased. This article surveys the Asafievan literature post-Asafiev: his reputation and the influence of his ideas. Before that survey, a quick primer of his life and broad musical thought is necessary.

### BIOGRAPHY, KEY TEXTS AND CONCEPTS

Asafiev was born into a modest, lower-middle-class family in St Petersburg, and took music lessons in and outside of school. In 1904, he began studies in composition at the Conservatoire, with Lyapunov, Lyadov, and especially Rimsky-Korsakov (Asaf'ev 1934: 47). That same year, Asafiev began to socialize in the influential Stasov circle, and quickly became a protégé of the elder statesman of Russian music (Kriukov 1981: 69). While Stasov promoted Asafiev's early writings, Asafiev would later distance himself from the elder scholar, later writing that 'to grasp Stasov, one has to forget about *Stasovshchina*' (Kriukov 1974: 380). Another vital formative influence was Boleslav Iavorskii, a composer and one of the key music theorists of his generation. His *Stroenie muzykal'noi rechi* (Iavorskii 1908) laid out his theory of modal rhythm, and together with his life partner, Sergei Protopopov, Iavorskii wrote some of the foundational theories for what would go on to become the recognisable 'Soviet' school of music theory (Protopopov 1930). Asafiev would build on these ideas through his writings in the 1920s, though would eventually cast them aside in his final decade. Asafiev graduated from the conservatoire in 1910 and worked as a répétiteur, though he struggled to gain a high-profile position until after the fall of Tsarism.

Asafiev began his writing career in 1914, writing for the journal *Muzyka* under the penname Igor Glebov (Viljanen 2016: 55). After the revolution, he began working in the music department of Narkompros and teaching at the Institute of Arts History (his career was arguably helped by the fact that the Bolsheviks had relatively few candidates when it came to appointing to high-profile posts). Meanwhile, his reviews and articles featured in multiple publications, including *Teatr*, *Muzykal'naia kul'tura*, *Sovremennaia muzyka*, *Krasnaia gazeta*, and many more.

In the 1920s, Asafiev published monographs on composers including Glazunov, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Skryabin, and he was also one of the first Soviet authors to express interest in the music of Schoenberg and Berg (though with equal parts scerp-

<sup>2</sup> I would argue that this is broadly the case in most musical communities over the course of history, to greater or lesser extents.

ticism, also). He had a slew of highly influential publications during the 1920s, including *Symphonic Etudes* (1922), *A Book about Stravinsky*, (1929), and *Muzykal'naiia forma kak protsess* (1930). The last of these would prove influential in the years after his death, but it was condemned by RAPM at the time of its publication (Herrera 2012: 293). Andrey Olkhovsky (one of Asafiev's students who later emigrated to the US) wrote that Asafiev 'was subjected to such fierce attacks from the leaders of RAPM that it is hard to understand how this extremely sensitive man could have endured it' (Olkhovsky 1955: 81).

Following the collapse of the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM) in 1931, Asafiev began to re-orient himself, partly through a renewed focus on composition (with varying amounts of success). He was prolific as a composer, though relatively few of these works remain in the repertory today, perhaps with the exception of *The Flames of Paris*; that hasn't stopped scholars describing it as 'excruciatingly boring' (Schwarz 1983: 150). There is not necessarily any contradiction between his revolutionary music theory and his rather more pedestrian compositional aesthetic: Viljanen writes that 'as much as his theory was inspired by the modernist music of the 1920s, his own completely conventional compositions appear as the practical realisations of his theory' (Viljanen 2016: 619).

When Shostakovich was publicly chastised in 1936, Asafiev was regarded as one of the figures who had shaped his musical path:

The most visible of the theoreticians of Formalism... Characteristic is the unique 'double-dealing' of Asafiev, who propagates Formalism, extols the trans-sense music of the German Expressionists Schoenberg and Alban Berg, but himself, as a composer, composes music that is relatively accessible (Clark and Dobrenko 2007: 238).

Asafiev quickly pivoted to distance himself from Shostakovich (Herrala 2012: 292). He resumed writing in the 1940s, with a rapid succession of works including *Glinka*, and, most famously, his 1942 magnum opus *Intonatsiia* (published in 1947). His writing style and philosophical approach, influenced especially by Bergson and Losski, favoured a syncretic approach. In this way, concepts could be worked out over decades but also a plethora of sources could be combined. Bergson is best known for his philosophy of time, which influenced Marcel Proust in his *À la recherche du temps perdu*, but his philosophy of language was just as influential in his day. In particular, he called for a violent reshaping of language, in which technical terms could be reworked and adapted as malleable tools, rather than as fixed structural units. The result is a mode of discourse in which definitions are difficult to unravel, as Asafiev liberally used 'terms from other disciplines as metaphors for musical phenomena' (Haas 1998: 55). His writing style did not necessarily help matters. He preferred to write without drafts or edits:

My language stems from this constant temptation to translate music into words rather than retelling 'programmes'. I'm always looking for expressions, but I'm not staring painfully at the paper; before writing down, I think about music to myself, almost unconsciously – even I can't explain exactly how. Then, after long nervous hesita-

tion, I feel that something is ready. Then I sit down and write in one gulp, without corrections, which I hate, and without sketches and copies. I have all the materials in my head strictly worked out, and I hate drafts. This is the rough process of my work (Kriukov 1981: 31).

From Asafiev's extraordinarily large output as a critic and scholar, such a writing process resulted in a body of work that displays remarkable clarity in thinking, though evolving over several decades.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in one of his most important concepts, introduced in some of his very first writing: symphonism (Haas 1992: 412). In Asafiev's view, music of any genre could reach the condition of symphonism, be it opera, solo sonata, or symphonic work. Broadly conceived, Asafiev used the term in place of 'developmental', as in a large-scale musical dialogue that was unified by musical motifs. In addition, it also required a grand sense of musical drama. He famously asserted that 'not every symphony is symphonic' (Asaf'yev 1981: 96). I would suggest a concise definition as the text-book-like ideal of a symphony and its development, but that belies Asafiev's wider philosophical intention behind the term. He wrote 'symphonism appears to us as a continuity of musical consciousness (forthcoming through sound)' (Ibid.: 97). Following pressure from external forces in the early 1930s, Asafiev began to move his interests towards an exploration of issues that could align with Marxist thought. Another key term from this period is his conception of the 'Process' of musical form (hence the title of his 1930 text). The Process that Asafiev sketches out is a view of musical forms as organisms that grow in a quasi-organic manner, assuming individual structures that result from their musical properties (Tull 1977: 186). As opposed to traditional *formenlehre*, Asafiev's conception of form was that it resulted from active musical processes as a 'socially determined phenomenon' (Asaf'yev 1963: 21). This took influence from Ernst Kurth's theory of linear counterpoint, particularly Kurth's characterisation of dynamism of form (Viljanen 2020: 148). Asafiev also wrote of particular stages to the process of music: *initium-movere-terminum* (or *i:m:t* for short, roughly corresponding to 'beginning, middle, end') (Tull 1977: 240). This active manifestation of form as an active process in music is part of the thinking that eventually leads to *intonatsiya*.

Most famous of all, but perhaps the least understood outside of Russia, is Asafiev's use of the term '*intonatsiia*.'<sup>3</sup> Iavorskii had used the same term but only in reference to a particular resolution following a tritone, itself understood as a kind of building block of more complex harmonic progressions (Ewell 2019a). In Asafiev's work, *intonatsiya*'s significance expanded enormously: he went so far as to say 'without intoning and outside of intoning, there can be no music' (Asaf'yev 1963: 198). In his early usage, its significance was similar to the standard English translation ('accuracy of pitch or quality of sound'). In the mid 1920s, he began to shift position,

3 Philip Ewell shared the joke: at Asafiev's funeral, two musicologists are talking. One says to the other "It's a shame about Boris Vladimirovich", to which the other replies, "yes... it's also a shame he never explained what he meant by *intonatsiia*!" (Ewell 2019b, fn. 47).

however, using the term to refer to the 'projection of meaning onto sound' (Haas 1998: 61) This evolved to refer to particular musical units that evoked significant social meanings (though Asafiev was never keen to list these terms). In 1929, he wrote:

I mean thereby the totality of sounds from whatever source, not only the audible music but the whole phenomena of sound, actually or potentially audible as music. To intone means to define a system of sound-relationships (Asaf'ev 1982: 7).

In its final (and most influential) iteration, Asafiev deployed the term to encompass a complex set of historical and national emotive meanings, to be communicated through music. This provided a conveniently Marxist way of viewing musical history: that musical meaning was the product of *intonatsiya* that held social significance, but that today, the origins of these meanings might be forgotten. In *Intonatsiia* (1947), he lays out how specific musical elements evolved according to their social significance and wider musical meaning, and in reflection of human speech. In a quasi-Jungian sense, he suggested that these shadowy meanings still speak to us in music via collective memory; this concept arguably also stems from Iavorskii, who wrote of a 'musical consciousness' that refers to a shared cultural experience that could unite people in a particular era or society. Thus, *intonatsiya* are musical symbols, broadly speaking, the combination of which creates a meaningful piece of music.

Asafiev was against a prescriptive listing of *intonatsiya* elements, however: the *intonatsiya* behind a piece's meaning ought to be identifiable by labelling its significance in the first place. Haas writes: 'Asafyev never intended the concept of *intonatsiia* to be applied to technical analysis (whose usefulness he questioned anyway), nor did he draw up lists of *intonatsiia* and apply them to individual compositions' (Haas 1998: 61).

There is some relation to be found between Asafiev's final ideas of *intonatsiya* and the Baroque-era rhetorical figure, or the wider field of musical hermeneutics. The latter was founded by Hermann Kretschmar, and Asafiev had read his works in the 1920s (Viljanen 2016: 457). Asafiev was particularly influenced by Kretschmar's concept of 'musical experience', in which listeners could attach their impressions and memories onto a work. A much later body of theory developed by Leonard Ratner and utilised by Kofi Agawu as 'topic theory' has some parallels (Agawu 1991). In a similar way, Ratner and Agawu referred to musical topics as units of meaning, and the combination of these could construct more complex meanings for the listener. This is perhaps the closest parallel to Asafiev's *intonatsiya* in Anglophone music theory, but it does not encompass the social significance and emotional depth intended behind Asafiev's term. It was *intonatsiya* especially that became his most influential concept, central to his legacy.

Asafiev's remarkable reputation and influence was built up over a surprisingly short amount of time. Arguably, it can be traced to a December 1940 issue of the journal *Sovetskaia muzyka*, in which Daniel Zhitomirskii sung Asafiev's praises (he was also featured on the cover). While presenting an overview of Asafiev's thoughts, the article gave a convenient exoneration for his previous interest in modernist music:

Glebov went through a period of crisis, a reassessment of the foundations of his worldview [and] a radical change in his literary style, which is quite obvious when comparing his old articles with the works of the late 1920s and early 1930s [...] What he wrote over the years – as well as everything written by outstanding representatives of literary modernism – Blok, Bryusov, Bely, etc. – eloquently demonstrates how contradictory and therefore multifaceted Russian modernism was: [...] anti-bourgeois and striving, in essence, towards revolution and towards socialism (Zhitomirskii 1940: 6).

Honours soon followed; in 1943, Asafiev was awarded a Stalin Prize for ‘lifetime achievement’ in musicology (Frolova-Walker 2016: 314), and he was awarded a Class I Stalin Prize for his study *Glinka* in 1948 (Ibid.: 318). He had lived long enough to see his ideas take hold among more general music circles, including in academia but also in music criticism. Resuming his prolific pace of writing, Asafiev’s place at the heart of the Soviet music establishment was sealed with the publication of *Intonatsiia* in 1947. His health had deteriorated at the same time that his work succeeded, however. In May 1947, Asafiev suffered a stroke that left him housebound, though he continued to write (Herrala 2012: 313). By 1948, he had been appointed to the relatively honorary position of Chairman of the Soviet Composer’s Union (Vlasova 2010: 323). The events of that same year would not only rock Soviet music, but also raise questions about Asafiev’s legacy.

### THE ‘ZHDANOVSHCHINA’

Having spurned Soviet writers in 1946, Andrey Zhdanov turned his attention to composers in 1948. The Culture Ministry singled out Vano Muradeli’s opera *The Great Friendship* for stinging criticism, but soon found that Muradeli’s faults were indicative of wider issues across Soviet music. Later that year, high-profile figures like Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Myaskovsky were humiliated before their peers. The Composers’ Union discussions threw into sharp relief the fact that there still wasn’t a sufficiently practical definition for music that would encapsulate the required socialist-realist aesthetic. Composers could look to useful models, such as Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, but even that had been rendered suspect by the composer’s denouncement. More concretely, composers could have looked to the 1930s ‘song operas’ that had enjoyed great success, starting with Ivan Dzerzhinsky’s *Quiet Flows the Don* (1935), and continued by Tikhon Khrennikov in *Into the Storm* (1939). In 1948, Khrennikov himself was elected as the young-faced general secretary of the composers’ union, able to serve as figurehead to enact Zhdanov’s wishes, but also to serve as a good example.

As newly appointed chairman, Asafiev was tasked with delivering a keynote at the first All-Union Congress of the Union of Soviet Composers in April 1948. As he was still seriously ill, a talk was read in his absence, titled ‘30 years of Soviet music and the tasks of Soviet composers’ (see Asaf’ev 1948): the authorship of this text has been the source of considerable debate. Controversially, the talk supported the resolutions of the Central Committee that had condemned Prokofiev and Myaskovsky,

both of whom were long-standing personal friends of Asafiev's, and whom he had recently described as 'the pride and glory of Soviet music' (Tull 1977: 89–90). Alexander Werth, a Moscow correspondent for the *Guardian* newspaper, speculated whether Asafiev had been pressured to write the text (Werth 1949: 97–98); Olkhovsky wrote that 'not everything written and signed in the Soviet Union, however, expresses the writer's real thought' (Olkhovsky 1955: 83). Western scholars have recently pored over the authorship of this article, culminating most recently in Patrick Zuk's article, in which he concludes that 'there is not a shred of evidence to suggest that [Asafiev] was coerced into behaving as he did' (Zuk 2019: 155). Meri Herrala presents a more nuanced overview, concluding that Asafiev's talk was most likely ghost-written by figures including Dmitri Kabalevsky and Boris Iarustovskii, including some parts assembled from Asafiev's recent articles (Herrala 2012: 299–300). Whatever the extent of Asafiev's involvement in the keynote, it remained 'one of the most disturbing incidents in this whole disturbing business' (Werth 1949: 98). The overall events of 1948 confirmed that aspects of Asafiev's musical thought had been appropriated by the Central Committee: in particular, his emphasis on the melodic 'song quality' ('pesennost') of Russian and Soviet music as rooted in folk tradition, which could be held aloft as the antithesis of formalism.

On 27 January 1949, Asafiev died unexpectedly. In the days leading up to his death, he was still writing and signing off on articles. He had also been kept informed of the organisation for the upcoming musicologists' plenary, the first of its kind. It was at this lesser-known event that Soviet music history was rewritten, and where the tone of decades' worth of music criticism would be set. The key difference between 1948 and 1949 is the sense of scale. While the 1948 brouhaha was outward facing to the world with ramifications around the Eastern bloc, the February 1949 proceedings were insular. Musicologists were accused of multiple charges: that they did not 'push' composers to write sufficiently socialist-realist music; that their own writings did not celebrate the achievements of socialist-realist music; and that their own writings did not sufficiently celebrate the achievements of Soviet music, instead showing a 'dependence on the West' (Schwarz 1983: 255).

Speaking at the plenary, Khrennikov highlighted key studies on Russian music that served to put it behind Western trends of composition (Khrennikov 1949: 8). The number of musicologists who were named ran to dozens, including some of Asafiev's former pupils (Schwarz 1983: 253). They all apologised, insisting that they must have understood Asafiev's teaching and pledged to change their ways. One result was the divide that continues to this day between studies on Russian music and any music from outside Russia (Manulkina 2017). Since the musicologists were very frequently the same people writing music criticism, what happened in one sphere was naturally reflected in the other. The result was that the entire tone of all writing on music in the Soviet Union changed rapidly within a matter of months.



## POSTHUMOUS LEGACY

In the 1949 proceedings, Asafiev had been held aloft as a positive role model for musicologists and critics (Khrennikov 1949: 12). The appropriation of his ideas, however, led to a wider pseudo-scientific justification for proving the supposed ideological worth of any given piece. Levon Hakobian writes:

Asaf'ev's idea of intonation was used by him and especially by official Soviet ideological services as a theoretical base for debunking anything new and unusual in modern music (one can hardly imagine a worse example of misusing a musical-theoretical conception) (Hakobian 2015: 19–20).

This resulted in music criticism that was rife with Asafievan terminology, though straying far from his own usage. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, musicologists were keen to be viewed as pushing composers towards socialist-realism, and the discourse of *intonatsiya* provided a high-visibility means to do this. Secondly, if music critics wished to either condemn or praise any new work, they could very easily resort to *intonatsiya* to 'scientifically' identify their interpretations as actually existing within the work. There was also a flurry of scholars trying to place Asafiev's concepts within Marxist-Leninist thought, to varying levels of success:

I am of course aware of the numerous – and, it must be said, clumsy – attempts to vulgarize the intonational approach, and outright attempts to tie Boris Asafiev's "theory of intonation" directly to the Marxist phase of Soviet musicology, although Asafiev made his discovery before he got to know the ABCs of Marxism. It was not difficult to do that, because in the field of Soviet musicology there really was a great deal of vulgarization and pseudo-Marxist debasement of the intonational approach, which essentially had nothing to do with Marxism as such. The many Soviet (and closely related East-European) interpreters of Asafiev tried to "translate" him into the language of Marxist teaching, thereby doing him an unintended disservice (Zemtsovsky 2002: 183).

With Zemtsovsky's criticism in mind, it is intriguing to trace how definitions were negotiated after Asafiev's death. Lev Kulakovskii published an important article in 1952, which included the following:

The so-called 'theory of intonations', which has a wide circulation in our musicology, has been causing a lot of theoretical controversy lately. We think of this theory [as a tool] for the struggle to raise the artistic level of Soviet music, for genuine realism and mastery. Attempts at practical application of the 'theory of intonation' are tied by the hands of musicologists trying to guide composers... We do not presently have the ability to include those numerous interpretations of the term 'intonation' that were proposed by B.V. Asaf'yev: this should be the subject of special discussion (Kulakovskii 1952: 39).

It is evident that three years after his death, critics were still wrestling with Asafiev's ideas, though still proclaiming his influence and brilliance. This posthumous elevation had several stultifying effects. Partly, it stifled the creativity of musical criticism, as these texts became awash with Asafiev's terms, without definition and often misused. At the same time as music criticism was struggling with Asafiev's ideas, however, the field of music theory ploughed ahead with developing them. This slightly less well-known legacy is the more remarkable story of Asafiev's influence.

Dmitri Kabalevsky had a notable role in canonising Asafiev even during the latter's lifetime, having commissioned Zhitomirskii's 1940 article while editor of *Sovetskaia muzyka* (Viljanen 2016: xxix). In 1951, Kabalevsky edited the first published appraisal of Asafiev's career, placing Asafiev at the heart of Soviet musicology (Kabalevskii 1951). Beginning in 1951, a project was launched to gather together a selection of Asafiev's works into five volumes. Kabalevsky's foreword to the first volume is revealing, if only for how close it moves into hagiography at times:

Not only an outstanding talent, but also the ultimate tension of creative will, discipline, perseverance, purpose of mission, and amazing performance can explain the incredible productivity of Asafiev-Glebov... This entire publication is based on the desire to make available to musicians and music-lovers everything of value that was written by B.V. Asafiev (Igor Glebov), referring to the real achievements of Soviet musicology, which can and should advance our thought about music (Kabalevskii, writing in Asaf'ev 1952, vol. I: 3–39).

As Kabalevsky took on more responsibility in the administration of Soviet music, he continued to promote Asafiev's ideas. When he came to put together his famous 'new syllabus' for music education in the 1970s, he took direct inspiration from Asafiev's writings on music teaching (Lepherd 1990).

Boris Iarustovskii was another key figure in the managing of Asafiev's legacy; he had studied under Asafiev for his doctorate. It emerged after Asafiev's death that Iarustovskii had been one of the principal authors behind the controversial 1948 keynote, though he insisted that Asafiev had taken an active role (Orlova 1964: 392). After being appointed Professor at the Moscow Conservatory in 1956, Iarustovskii began writing on opera, and especially on Tchaikovsky. His work particularly built on intonatsiya and Asafiev's conception of melody as the central driving conflict behind opera. In 1965, Iarustovskii edited a collection of theoretical essays that discussed intonatsiya, including contributions from Czech, German, and Polish authors (Iarustovskii 1965). Writing for an international audience in 1974, Iarustovsky heaped praise on Asafiev and stated his influence was 'manifested in the most diverse spheres of Soviet musicology' (Iarustovskii 1974: 53).

Lev Mazel proved instrumental in the early dissemination of Asafiev's ideas. Mazel was among the very first Soviet-trained musicologists, but he came under fire as a 'cosmopolitan' during the 1949 attacks on musicologists (Schwarz 1983: 251). He was rehabilitated by 1954 and published widely on elements of music theory. In a 1957 overview of Asafiev's theoretical concepts, Mazel reflected that 'there is almost no reflection' in Soviet textbooks on Asafiev's theories, especially in terms of



form and harmony (Mazel 1957: 73). His article especially dealt with what Mazel perceived were the continuing 'errors' in the implementation of Asafiev's ideas. Mazel's later publications on musical form developed conceptions of intonatsiya even further into the realm of musical structure (Mazel 1979; Iarustovskii 1974: 54).

In the 1960s, attempts to reappraise and consolidate Asafiev's theoretical legacy were pushed further, including the republication for the first time since 1930 of *Muzykal'naia forma kak protsess*. In 1966, Nelli Shakhnazarova published the book *Intonatsionnyi 'slovar' i problema narodnosti*, which heralded the reappraisal of Asafiev's intonatsiya from the perspective of folk and national music. Shakhnazarova went further than Asafiev ever did, in proposing a 'dictionary' of potential intonatsiya. She writes: 'with Asafiev's theory of intonatsiya, it has become much easier to trace the direct connections of music with the material world, with the everyday life of people, and in addition, to trace the path of transforming life into musical images' (Shakhnazarova 1966: 3).

Into the 1970s, interest in Asafiev's works was spearheaded by Elena Orlova and Andrei Kryukov, who assembled several important texts on Asafiev's biography and overall thought. These included a full monograph (Orlova 1984b), a collection of edited memoirs from Asafiev's contemporaries (Kryukov 1974), and a volume of important documents from the RGALI collections (Kryukov 1981). At the same time, several of Asafiev's earlier works that were considered unmentionable in the high-Stalin era, including *Symphonic Etudes*, were reissued with introductions that identified Asafiev's philosophical influences and that explained his early lack of a Marxist-Leninist line of argument (see Orlova's introduction to Asaf'yev 1970: 6). From the late 1970s and into the 1980s, several further volumes of Asafiev's collected writings appeared, largely edited by Orlova, in an attempt to expand and correct the oversights of the 1952–7 collected works. This was coupled with the translation of *Muzykal'naia forma kak protsess* and *Intonatsiia* into German and English, in 1976 and 1977 respectively. This flurry of scholarly documentation led to reappraisal, particularly of Asafiev's 1920-era writings, but also extended his concept of intonatsiya into the realm of semiotics and musical interpretation.

Key among this revival is Vyacheslav Medushevskii, who expanded Asafiev's writing to propose an ambitious theory of intonational meaning, whereby interactions between right and left hemispheres of the brain could promote two levels of intonational construction. In Medushevskii's view, the structures of sound and music interacted with a kind of skeleton 'proto-intonatsiya' that was then understood by the listener to make the more concrete intonatsiya that resulted in the perception of meaning (Medushevskii 1981). Medushevskii's expansion of intonatsia includes aspects of semantics and neuroscience, representing arguably one of the most ambitious developments of Asafiev's theories (Medushevskii 1993).

At present, it remains sadly underexplored. Mark Aranovskii was especially interested in exploring Asafiev via recent 'semoiotic' theories, suggesting that intonation was the direct expression of the listener, and semiotics was the 'implied' suggestion of meaning to the listener (Aranovskii 1980). In his 1998 study *Muzykal'nyi tekst*, Aranovskii combines intonatsiya with Roland Barthes's approach to the structure of language, concluding that Asafiev's theories paved the way for understanding a

kind of 'intertextuality' in music (Aranovskii 1998: 67–68). Beyond this study, perhaps the most significant development of *intonatsiya* was that proposed by Valentina Kholopova. In 1984, she proposed an expansion of Asafiev's i:m:t triad of international function, this time to include the additions of emotional, pictorial, genre, style, and composite meanings (Kholopova 1984: 88).<sup>4</sup> Through these terms, Kholopova extends into a discussion of musical content and emotion, epitomised in her 2010 book *Musical Emotions* (Kholopova 2010). One final theorist of international renown is Eero Tarasti, a key scholar in the field of music semiotics, who has praised Asafiev as 'a great pioneer of musical semiotics' and one of his major influences (Khannov 2007: 185). In his key text, *Signs of Music*, Tarasti praises Asafiev's view on the relation between music and language (Tarasti 2002: 54–55). The success of Tarasti's work on musical semantics has clear nods to Asafiev's views on the relation between language, speech, and music.

## CONCLUSIONS

With these flourishing channels in recent and contemporary scholarship, it is easy to trace how Asafiev's influence continues on an international stage (in both Russian and English scholarship). Considering how Asafiev's fame was thrust to national attention in such a short space of time (and in such problematic circumstances as the Zhdanovshchina), and while the abuse of his theories in the critical press is well known outside of Russia, it is heartening that his work has been reappraised and viewed outside of its limited socialist-realist contexts. This article has set out to explore the wider theoretical reactions to Asafiev's ideas, beyond their generally poor deployment in the Soviet music press. Clearly, more research is required, particularly along the lines of Tarasti's claims that we ought to view Asafiev as proto-scholar of musical semantics, but also in Aranovskii's defence of Asafiev as an early proponent of 'intertextuality'. A key question remains: whether the concept of *intonatsiya* offers anything valuable to musicology today, or whether we should consider it as a historically-specific term that gained cultural significance through its appropriation in various Soviet channels (my initial suspicion is the latter). Despite this difficult issue, and the problematic aspects of his reception and biography, Asafiev was inarguably a figure at the very heart of Russian and Soviet musical thought. As has been shown above, he suffered at the hands of various Soviet authorities just as much as he was celebrated, and the legacy of that state control lingered over his work long after they had finished trying to appropriate his ideas.

4 For an English-language overview, see: <http://www.kholopova.ru/bibeng1.html> (accessed 06. 06. 2021).

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## ДАНИЈЕЛ ЕЛФИК

### БОРИС АСАФЈЕВ И СОВЈЕТСКА МИСАО О МУЗИЦИ: УГЛЕД И УТИЦАЈ

#### (РЕЗИМЕ)

Овај чланак испитује утицај Бориса Асафјева на совјетску мисао о музици, особито после његове смрти 1949. године. Тешко се може пренагласити Асафјељев утицај у совјетској музикологији, теорији музике и поготово музичкој критици. Иако је у публикацијама на енглеском језику поклањана пажња Асафјељевим теоријама, те су публикације често имале одбојан тон, делимично због рђаве примене Асафјељевих идеја које се понекад срећу у совјетској музичкој критици. Наиме, совјетски музички критичари су лако могли „ослободити“ или критиковати ново дело прибегавајући сировом фигуративном језику „интонације“, а да заиста никада не покажу никакво знање о теоријама Бориса Асафјева. Нажалост, управо се на такав утицај Асафјељевих идеја често указивало у његовој рецепцији на енглеском језику. Ова студија испитује како су се аутори после Асафјева ослањали на његове списе из сфере теорије музике, у циљу развијања и проширивања сопствених идеја.

Почињем од биографског прегледа и резимеа главних Асафјељевих публикација и појмова. Прате се бурни догађаји у каријери Асафјева, укључујући извесне нејасноће до краја 1917. године, иза које је уследила експлозија продуктивности током двадесетих година. Тридесетих година XX века био је жестоко критикован; тада је напустио писање и окренуо се компоновању. Разматрам кључне асафјељевске термине попут „симфонизма“, „процеса“ и „интонације“, од којих је сваки у самој сржи Асафјељеве музичке мисли. У његовој биографији се посебно фокусирам на године 1940–1949, када је неколико личности совјетске музике Асафјева начинило славним. То укључује



контроверзни Асафјељељев говор током „ждановизма“ 1948. године и касније покушаје да се утврди ниво његове умешаности (или чак подршке). Штавише, напад на музикологе из 1949. године несумњиво је представљао покушај окривљања дисциплине у грубо дефинисани калуп музичке мисли Бориса Асафјељева. У наставку рада истражујем асафјељељевску литературу после Асафјељева, почевши од настојања да се створи његова постхумна репутација, што је водио Дмитриј Кабалељевски, а касније с низом публикација Андреја Крјукова и, посебно, Елене Орлове. Био је то делимични покушај у правцу укидања стаљинистичке цензуре Асафјељељевих дела, укључујући изостављене одломке и читаве књиге које су биле повучене из оптицаја. Иза овога прелазим на излагање резимеа и прегледа кључних совјетских теоретичара и њихове примене Асафјељељевих идеја, укључујући Лава Мазеља, Бориса Јанустовског, Вјачеслава Медушевског, Марка Арановског и Валентину Холопову. Мој је закључак да разумевање утицаја Асафјељева захтева извесно преоцењивање на енглеском говорном подручју, узимајући у обзир широки обим уплива његових идеја, круцијалних за совјетску и постсовјетску музичку теорију.

Кључне речи: Борис Асафјељев, совјетска музика, теорија музике, музичка критика, музика и марксизам.



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