

# THE POLITICIZATION OF MUSIC DURING THE PERIOD OF TOTALITARIAN RULE IN BULGARIA (1944 – 1989)

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## ABSTRACT:

Since this is a phenomenon of recent times, the significance of the politicization of music during the period of totalitarian rule in Bulgaria (1944–1989) is still unexplored. This paper focuses on the interplay between the political regime, musical life in Bulgaria, and the status of Bulgarian composers. Many books, articles, conferences and PhDs have been presented recently in the field of cultural studies, promoting a multidisciplinary approach in several fields. A new approach to this dynamic period would clarify the overall development of Bulgarian musical culture in the twentieth century.

**KEYWORDS:** music, political aspects, Bulgaria, history of the twentieth century, Bulgarian composers

## INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the interplay between the political regime, musical life in Bulgaria and the status of Bulgarian composers between 1944 and 1989. My interest in the history and problems of Bulgarian composers and specifically in the politicization of music during the period of totalitarian rule in Bulgaria (1944–1989) stems from the early days of my musical career and my childhood. Music written by Bulgarian composers has significantly influenced me over the period of my formal education. Nowadays, there is an interest in Bulgarian classical and folk music mostly from American universities.

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## CULTURAL POLITICS

The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) remained in control of all political, economic, social, and cultural life during the aforementioned period. The Red Army occupation officially lasted three years, from September 1944 to December 1947. Many articles, conferences and doctoral theses have been presented recently in the field of cultural studies, promoting a multidisciplinary approach in several fields – history, politics and musicology. They depict the periods of political repression in Bulgaria and cast new light on the changes to the musical repertoire during the period 1944–1989. 1 February is the Day of Remembrance and Respect for Victims of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Parliament also proclaimed 23 August as the day of remembrance of the crimes of the national–socialist, communist and other totalitarian regimes, and as a day for commemorating the victims of these regimes.<sup>2</sup>

On 10 November 1989 – one day after the fall of the Berlin Wall – Bulgaria’s veteran Communist Party leader Todor Zhivkov<sup>3</sup> was overthrown. Besides industrialization and urbanization, other very important changes in cultural politics had occurred under the communist totalitarian dictatorships that ruled Bulgaria under Georgi Dimitrov (1947–1949), Vulko Chervenkov (1949–1956), and Todor Zhivkov (1956–1989). A new period of cultural politics coincided with Lyudmila Zhivkova’s term as chair of the Committee for Science and Culture, from 1975 to 1981. In particular, Bulgaria’s “public relations” with Western Europe, the United States, India and Japan improved greatly as cultural contacts were intensified. Bulgaria celebrated the 1300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Bulgarian state, spending lavish amounts of money on nationwide celebrations and the building of public monuments in 1981. The cultural politics of Bulgaria in the period 1944–1989 have a close connection to the aforementioned leaders. Nowadays, the Museum of Socialist Art is open in Sofia, focusing on the communist period. Many books and poems written by Bulgarian writers, kept in the dark during the communist regime, were published at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bulgarian composers were not as courageous as their Russian and Polish counterparts and followed the party line.

## COMPOSERS AND THE “SOVIET GENERAL LINE”

Relationships between government authorities and composers and performers proved to be complex yet dynamic. Both governments called for new music to draw on popular national traditions and to communicate to the public in easily accessible

2 The decision was adopted by the 41<sup>st</sup> Bulgarian National Assembly on 19 November 2009. The European Day of Remembrance, known as the Black Ribbon Day in some countries and observed on 23 August, is the international Remembrance Day for victims of totalitarian communist regimes, Stalinism, Nazism and fascism.

3 Todor Hristov Zhivkov (1911–1998) was the former President of Bulgaria, and the leader of the Communist Party from 1954 until 10 November 1989, when the Communist regime was toppled and a multi-party system was established in Bulgaria. “His daughter, Lyudmila Todorova Zhivkova (1942–1981), was one of the few women in Eastern Europe to achieve significant political influence during the Communist era.”

ways. “Formalism” and abstruse harmonic experimentation were pointedly criticized. Jazz music was banned as it was deemed “politically inappropriate.” For their part many composers found ways to live with communist policies and to take advantage of government sponsorship. A number of them proved willing during the high Stalinist period to compose in genres and styles such as mass songs, cantata, oratorio (dedicated to the Communist Party), simplistic music dominated by social, historical and nationalistic issues. Some composers who cooperated and kept the idea that culture must be close to the people were tolerated and applauded. Many others, even those known for their communist beliefs, were forced to adapt to this philosophy. Other composers, who did not have any political preferences, were dubbed “formalists” and people who propagated “bad Western European culture.” In a recent meeting with my old professors, I asked them: “What were the negative sides of ‘Composing within the General Line’ during the totalitarian regime?” The answer was: “The carrot or stick”, and talentless musicians, seeking better job opportunities, strived to maintain their close relationship with the Communist Party. They stressed that not “everything was bad during the totalitarian regime”.

For example, the most prominent Bulgarian composers of the twentieth century such as Pancho Vladigerov (1899–1978)<sup>4</sup> and Lyubomir Pipkov (1904–1974)<sup>5</sup> were criticized for writing music dedicated to the Communist Party after the end of communist regime. After September 9<sup>th</sup> 1944, Vladigerov also wrote works related and/or dedicated to the Communist Party. These are the *Symphony No 2 May*, op. 44 (1949)<sup>6</sup> for string

4 Pancho Vladigerov (1899–1978) studied composition and piano at the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. He was awarded twice the Mendelssohn Prize of the Academy for his Piano Concerto No 1 (in 1918) and the *Ten Impressions* for Piano, Op. 9 (in 1920). Vladigerov became music director at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin and worked with the famous theatre director Max Reinhardt (1920–1932). His mother, Dr Eliza Pasternak, was a Russian Jew and he decided to return to Bulgaria in 1932. Vladigerov was appointed professor of piano, chamber music and composition at the National Academy of Music in Sofia, which is now named after him. He is considered the “Patriarch” of Bulgarian music and the founder of Bulgaria’s national music school. He primarily wrote works for large symphony orchestras, and was also a great pianist. His music is a unique synthesis between late romanticism and Bulgarian folklore. Vladigerov’s most performed and emblematic work is unquestionably *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*, Op. 16 (1928). His music is performed all over the world.

5 Lyubomir Pipkov (1904–1974) is the son of the composer Panagiot Pipkov (1871–1942). He studied composition with Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger and graduated from the École Normal de Musique de Paris. Pipkov’s operas and orchestral works are comparable in style with Shostakovich, Bartók and Britten. His music represents Bulgarian classical music of the twentieth century and its stylistic characteristics, thematic and harmonic language, rhythm and building of form. Pipkov was among the founding members of the Contemporary Music Society (1933). He was appointed Professor of Vocal Ensembles at the National Academy of Music in 1948. Pipkov chaired the Union of Bulgarian Composers from 1945 to 1954, and he presented his works in many European countries; later on he participated in a number of music congresses and was a board member of international music competitions. He began publishing the magazine *Music* in 1948 (later renamed *Bulgarian Music* in 1953).

6 *May Symphony* was recorded by the Bulgarian National Radio Symphony Orchestra under the

orchestra, and the heroic overture *The Ninth of September*, op. 45 (1949) for symphony orchestra, as well as some mass choir songs. Some of these works supported the composer's successful efforts to save prominent musicians such as his former student Trifon Silyanovski (1923–2005)<sup>7</sup> and Alexander Nikolov (1915–1961),<sup>8</sup> who had been convicted and sent to the Belene forced labour camp. The violin player Alexander Nikolov, better known by his nickname “Sasho Sladura”, liked telling political jokes. Somebody reported him to the authorities. He was sent to the Lovech labour camp, where in 1961 he was beaten to death. Alexander Nikolov played the violin in the “Ovcharov” jazz band.<sup>9</sup> An invitation to tour in the USA in 1949 aroused jealousy, maliciousness, and political repression.

Vladigerov also tried to help his brother-in-law Anton Zhekov (an officer from the Shumen army unit), who had been sentenced to death. The composer dedicated and presented the manuscript of his song *September 1944* to lieutenant-general Dobri Terpeshev,<sup>10</sup> in an effort to obtain a commutation of Zhekov's death sentence to life imprisonment. The People's court abolished the death penalty, but still Zhekov was shot in March 1945. One of the composer's closest friends and fans Dimitar Shishmanov (1889–1945, Minister of Foreign Affairs between 14 October 1943 and 1 June 1944) met the same tragic fate. Vladigerov dedicated *Autumn Elegy* for piano, op. 15, no 2 (1922) to him. The composer was famous abroad and was required to become a member of the Bulgarian

conductor Alexander Vladigerov (1933–1993); for recordings, visit the official website of the Bulgarian National Radio, [www.bnr.bg](http://www.bnr.bg).

7 Trifon Silyanovski (1923–2005) was a Bulgarian composer, pianist, pedagogue and musical theoretician. He was persecuted by the authorities for political reasons and he was sent to a forced labour camp (1949–51); later on he was periodically jailed and was interned outside Sofia. His music was banned until 1959. Then he was allowed to work as an accompanist at the Sofia Opera. Silyanovski co-founded the Blagoevgrad Chamber Opera in 1973, where he worked as music director until 1982. He taught score reading at Plovdiv Academy of Music and Dance Art (1982–91). After the fall of the communist regime he was appointed professor at the National Academy of Music in Sofia (1997).

8 Not much is known about Alexander Nikolov as the documentation about him was destroyed during the totalitarian regime. Nikolov studied at an Italian school and the French college “Saint Augustine” in Plovdiv, and graduated from the Prague Conservatory. He worked at the Royal Symphony Orchestra in Sofia, which was disbanded and later renamed Sofia State Philharmonic Orchestra in 1949. After losing his job, Nikolov started playing jazz in restaurants orchestras, and as a performer was most beloved by the public.

9 Assen Ovcharov (1906–1972) created the first classical jazz orchestra in Bulgaria. He was arrested and charged with espionage for the USA and England in 1949. Ovcharov must have visited the foreign missions, but only in order to obtain original musical scores. The government arrested him and after a six-month stay in prison, he was exiled to Tutrakan. Later, he was sent into the Belene forced labour camp. He was released in 1952, but accused again and sentenced to six years in jail in a scandalous political process. The orchestra's soloist was the vocalist Lea Ivanova (1923–1986), another repressed musician, sent to Nozharevo forced labour camp.

10 Dobri Terpeshev (1884–1967) was a minister without portfolio in the first communist government after 9 September 1944. Later on he was victimized by the communists because of his speech against Todor Zhivkov and interned outside Sofia.

Fatherland Front<sup>11</sup> as were many other public figures. Although it seems that Vladigerov's music was very nationalistic and political, he was in fact trying to keep away from politics and one cannot therefore speak about a new period in his work following 1944.

On the contrary, Lyubomir Pipkov never hid his sympathy for the Communist Party before World War II. Bulgarian partisans of the Fatherland Front resistance movement entered the capital city of Sofia singing his song *Shumete Debri i Balkani* ["Whisper Nooks and Mountains"] (Example 1), written in spring 1944. After 9 September 1944, like many other composers, Pipkov had to adjust to the communist regime, making his music more understandable and acceptable to the masses. He began writing mass songs, which were very popular during those years and recommended by the government. In addition to their expressiveness and strong sense of drama, his work from the mid-1950s brought a sense of optimism. This is particularly true of the *Oratorio for Our Time* (1959) and *Muted Songs* (1972). The Third Symphony (1965)<sup>12</sup> and the Fourth Symphony (1970) are highly individual, while the piano piece *Spring Caprices* (1972) borrows compositional ideas from earlier works.

Since the fall of the regime in 1989, many Bulgarian composers have been criticized for writing works dedicated to Stalin. However, all of them are now considered amongst the classics of Bulgarian music. In an older example, the orchestral musicians and the guest conductor refused to play Pipkov's *Heroic overture* (1949) – dedicated to Stalin – in a concert for the October Revolution in 1987. The decision to include this work came from "the top". The answer to the performers' refusal (again from "the top") was that "this work has many good characteristics, and it has been unfairly forgotten" (Peev 1990). However, Peev did not consider the fact that Pipkov's opera *Momchil* (1948) had been publicly rejected by the *Music* magazine in 1951. The composer wrote the *Heroic overture* in 1949, based on musical material from his opera. Then the opera was "bad" and the overture "good", but can the opposite be said nowadays? How many years need to pass before people reach the right historical and musicological approach to composers and their work in the aforementioned period?

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL MUSIC NETWORK

Nowadays Bulgarian musicology considers that the decentralization of Bulgarian music from the capital city Sofia and the establishment of a cultural network throughout the whole country can be seen as a positive aspect of the communist period. Ideological limits did not necessarily compromise artistry. New opera houses, symphony orchestras, secondary music schools and many other professional and amateur music ensem-

11 The Bulgarian Fatherland Front (OF) was an anti-fascist popular organization founded in 1942. After the People's Uprising of 9 September 1944, it formed a government and won a large majority after being the only party or alliance listed on the ballot (November 18, 1945). The Fatherland Front was the largest mass organization in socialist Bulgaria; it would continue to be a political alliance until the fall of communism in 1989.

12 Pipkov's biographer Ivan Hlebarov noted that, "Pipkov wrote his Third Symphony in the 60s and he condemned the repressive system, which itself swallowed up the revolution" (Hlebarov 1997:138).

bles were founded throughout the country. The Sofia Opera House briefly interrupted its activities after the bombing raids of 1944, but the increase in state subsidies in the years following 1945 gave a significant push to the company to renew its position. State-sponsored folk ensembles were charged not only with preserving heritage, but also with the task of elevating folk art forms to the level of high culture. New festivals of Bulgarian music were organized (for example the Pan-Bulgarian Competition for Singers and Performers, the National Review of Bulgarian Music, the Periodical Reviews of the State Symphony Orchestras. Some years later the Annual Review of Works by Young Composers, and the March Music Festivals in Ruse began). All these state organizations and music festivals systematically stimulated the development of Bulgarian music and performance both on a national and international scale. Bulgarian composers during the second half of the twentieth century experimented with new tonality in vocal and instrumental music, and recordings and concert tours abroad won much wider audiences for traditional Bulgarian vocal music.

#### *An interview*

Immediately after World War II, the ideological line of the Soviet and Bulgarian governments dominated musical life. I would like to continue with an extract of an interview given by a 75-year-old Bulgarian musician:

*We were serving under a false slogan. The slogan was about how art should be close to the people ... There are mass popular genres, there is entertaining music, let's hope it's good. We have very good composers writing popular music, there is more entertaining literature – those are for the mass consumer; and great art with high artistic merits, in my deep conviction, is an elitist manifestation of the human spirit. It is not possible for Goethe's Faust to become a mass culture of all people or the symphonies of my beloved Johannes Brahms – and it is not necessary!*

*But I was not saying what I was thinking, and I was repeating a formula of the founder of Soviet aesthetics, Andrey Zhdanov, who said: All great art is close to the great masses of people. ' This is not true! And that made us make too many compromises. For example, as a musician I was developing the theory that the religious nature of Bach's music did not reflect his religiosity, and that was the obligatory garment in which he had to dress his works - he and Handel. This is not true! Bach was deeply religious! But I did not say that, and I knew I was lying to people. I have been a member of the Communist Party; I have to say since 1967..... and I still remember how they persecuted Dobrin Petkov (one of the greatest Bulgarian conductors) for being a distributor of Western decadent music. Why? Because he played the works of Stravinsky, Prokofiev and other great contemporary composers. And do you know that he studied in London? And he was a typical English gentleman. They put him in front of the party leadership and began to grill him: "Why do you distribute Western (ideology)?" He tried to explain that these are great composers – "No, explain it to us". Finally, Dobrin did not comply and said: "Look, Comrades, music is an area in which, in order to express an opinion, you still have to get into it a little, to understand." And Pencho Kubadinski told him: "What do you mean? That we are fools?" And Dobrin said: "Something like that." (Kelbecheva 2014: 8, 9).*

## SOCIALIST REALISM IN BULGARIA (1940s)

After the 1944 socialist revolution, Socialist Realism dominated musical circles. All similarities with Western European contemporary classical music tradition were criticized and dismissed. The government promoted folklore as a symbol of national pride. "The more it is among the people, the closer it is to life!" became the new ideology. This "line" brought about the belief that each piece of music must reflect the happiness and success of the Bulgarian people. The arts were state funded (and regulated), centralized and acquired a strong ideological orientation. Additionally, artists not in favour with the government were regularly removed or banned from the stage. There were some periods of liberalization (meaning the entry of Western literature and music into Bulgaria in the 1950s, which lasted until the Hungarian revolution in October 1956). The state also controlled the Union of Bulgarian Composers, the production and distribution of records and musical scores, and even the repertoire of restaurant orchestras. Composers and musicologists developed the new socialist musical culture, and promoted Bulgarian music both nationally and internationally. Bulgarian folk music replaced the neo-romantic trend of the 1930s and 1940s. Many young composers and performers were not permitted to study abroad, and were only allowed to specialize within the Soviet Union. Bulgarian contemporary music dominated the public domain and was subject to detailed discussions, reflected in the pages of the publication of the Union of Bulgarian Composers, the monthly magazine *Bulgarian Music*. The magazine was first called *Music* and was initially published in 1948 by the Bulgarian Philharmonic Orchestra Directorate. After a brief interruption, from 1950 it was issued ten times a year.

By the end of the 1950s, Bulgarian composers were using modern compositional techniques such as dodecaphony, serialism and aleatoricism, as seen in the practice of Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg and Anton Webern. The effect of totalitarianism on music is particularly difficult to define. Art began to be judged by radically different standards and was used as a means for ideological propaganda. In totalitarian systems, composers were subjected to many forms of pressure. Many composers and musical figures in Bulgaria were either isolated or criticized for their works. Composers,



Jul Levi among Bulgarian composers (Sofia, 1952). Photo credit: Centropa (<http://www.centropa.org/photo/jul-levi-among-famous-bulgarian-composers>)

including Konstantin Iliev (1924–1988)<sup>13</sup> and Lazar Nikolov (1922–2005)<sup>14</sup> had many problems with the government and music critics. They were writing atonal music or using the twelve-tone system. Their music was rejected and they were accused by the “powerful of the day” of promoting Western formalism. Another substantial factor (not in favour of the young composers) was the conservatism of the greater part of the older generation of composers in charge of the Union of Bulgarian Composers from the 1940s to the mid–1980s. Beginning with his first composition, *Concerto for String Orchestra*, written in 1949 and premiered in 1951 (Example 2), Nikolov showed an interest in the contemporary tendencies in European music. 1956 was the year in which the partisan intolerance towards Nikolov and Iliev reached one of its ugliest climaxes. Works inspired by the Second Viennese School were simply absent from the stage. Even Lyubomir Pipkov (1904–1974), who chaired the Union of Bulgarian Composers from 1945 to 1954, was criticized for some of his works.

According to the needs of the time, many heroic and epic-romantic operas were written in 1940s and 50s. The most important include Pipkov’s *Momchil* (1939–43, based on a folk tale and staged in 1948), Marin Goleminov’s<sup>15</sup> *Ivaylo* (in the grand

13 Konstantin Iliev (1924–1988) graduated from the State Academy of Music in 1946, majoring in composition under Pancho Vladigerov, conducting under Marin Goleminov, and violin under Vladimir Avramov. He continued his studies at the Prague Music Academy, and attended quarter-tone composition classes given by Alois Hába in 1946–47. Iliev was one of Eastern Europe’s best conductors, and his conducting won recognition in many countries in Europe, America and Asia. He also was the undisputed leader of the musical avant-garde in the post war Bulgaria. He was appointed Professor of Orchestral Conducting at the State Academy of Music in Sofia in 1967. As a composer he was in a constant search of new paths for Bulgarian art music, and he was among the first to introduce modernist musical ideas into Eastern Europe and the first experimenter with non-tonal devices. During his years as a conductor, he established a professional orchestra and opera company in Ruse; he was the musical director of the Varna State Symphony Orchestra, and later on of the Sofia State Philharmonic orchestra. Thanks to his worldview, broader than that of those previously in charge of the Union of Bulgarian Composers until the 1980s, Iliev introduced the music of Schoenberg, Bartók, Honegger, Stravinsky, Webern, Messiaen, Stockhausen and Boulez to the Bulgarian public.

14 Lazar Nikolov (1922–2005) studied at the State Academy of Music in Sofia with Dimirat Nenov (piano and composition, 1946) and Pancho Vladigerov (composition, 1947). Like his close friend Konstantin Iliev, he began his creative path at a very difficult and complicated time. Nikolov was a prolific composer; he contributed substantially to the development of Bulgarian music in the second half of the twentieth century. Many of his works were exposed to very harsh criticism during his lifetime, and some of them were seldom performed. From the late 1960s, he began to take part in many contemporary music festivals, including the Warsaw Autumn Festival (1962, 1964, 1968); the Berlin Musik–Biennale (1969, 73, 79); the Zagreb Biennial (1967) etc. The Bulgarian National Radio and some foreign radio stations such as WDR, FR-3, and SRB recorded many of Nikolov’s works. Some of his compositions were published by Peters and Schott–Mainz. The composer taught score reading at the State Academy of Music (1961) and he was promoted to full professor in 1980. After the fall of the regime, Nikolov was granted a number of awards. He chaired the Union of Bulgarian Composers from 1992 to 1999.

15 Marin Goleminov (1908–2000) studied music (violin, composition and conducting) in Sofia, Paris and Munich. He was offered a post at the Sofia State Academy in 1943, where he taught orchestration, conducting and composition for over 40 years. Goleminov acquired fame as a composer with the



opera style), and Parashkev Hadjiev's<sup>16</sup> *Lud Gidiya* ("The Madcap", which is one of the best Bulgarian comic operas, also performed abroad), the last two premiered in Sofia in 1959. Hadjiev's first operetta, *Delyana* (1952) was brutally criticized and removed from the stage of the Sofia Musical Theatre in 1952. The story, in hindsight, is ridiculous but at that time it could have ruined any career. *Delyana* was condemned for the dance "Swing and Zos" (involving so called "morally decadent" youths who wore tight trousers and short skirts). A senior communist party member watched the operetta and he was disgusted to see ladies with short skirts and men with hats and canes screaming on stage. They were declared by him to be bourgeois characters, incompatible with socialism.<sup>17</sup>

### 1960s, 70s, 80s

The 1960s brought a relaxation of the political situation and composers enjoyed greater aesthetic freedom. Lilia Kracheva wrote in *A Short History of Bulgarian Musical Culture*: "In the 60s people were quiet and the Government didn't need their previous rough methods" (Kracheva 2001: 243). The 1960s Bulgarian avant-garde group of composers was also joined by Georgi Tutev (1924–1994), Ivan Spassov (1934–1996, a student of Kazimir Serotski in Warsaw), Vassil Kazandzhiev (b. 1934) and Simeon Pironkoff (1927–2000). The new interpretation of folklore and the adoption of many of the experiments carried out in the 1960s and 70s led to a new stage in the development of Bulgarian music. A new term, "European provincialism," was given to composers who employed serial, aleatoric, cluster or any such compositional tech-

production of his dance drama *Nestinarka* ("The Fire-Dancing Woman", 1942), which is considered to be the best Bulgarian ballet. He was elected Rector of the Sofia State Academy (1954–56), Director of the Sofia Opera (1965–67), and he was promoted to the position of academic (1989). Goleminov won the Gottfried von Herder Award of the Vienna University (1976). He wrote four operas, two dance dramas and four symphonies, other works for symphony and string orchestra, chamber music and theoretical studies. His numerous works are rooted in the melody, metre and rhythm of Bulgarian folk music.

<sup>16</sup> Parashkev Hadjiev (1912–1992) was born into a family of musicians and grew up in the theatre among singers, actors and musicians. He contributed significantly to Bulgarian professional music in the second half of the twentieth century. He was the most productive Bulgarian stage composer, writing 21 operas, six operettas and three musicals, a ballet, etc. He studied at the Sofia State Academy of Music with Andrey Stoyanov (piano) and Pancho Vladigerov (composition) and graduated in 1936. He continued his studies with Joseph Marx in Vienna in 1937; he also specialized in composition with H. Tissen at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, from 1938 to 1940. After his return to Bulgaria, Hadjiev was appointed Professor of Harmony and Composition at the State Academy of Music in 1947, a post he held for over forty years. His textbooks of harmony and music theory essentials still educate generations of Bulgarian musicians. He chaired the Union of Bulgarian Composers (1990–92). Some of his operas were staged in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Russia, etc.

<sup>17</sup> See the article "Vredno proizvedenie" ["A Harmful Work"] in *Rabotnicheskoto delo* [Workers' Deed] Newspaper (27–10–1952), which was the organ of the BCP's Central Committee and was one of the newspapers of the People's Republic of Bulgaria's with the highest circulation.

niques in the early 1970s. The party–activist composers used this term to show that their colleagues were using techniques as old as World War II, thus acting as residents of a remote province of Europe. Although some of the avant-garde composers were able to present their work at the Warsaw Autumn Festival, the Berlin Musik–Biennale, the Zagreb Biennial, and so on, they did not have the slightest chance of breaking through the Iron Curtain. The majority of Bulgarian musicians, performers, students and journalists who were interested in these trends had either to count on chance radio broadcasts of performances outside of Bulgaria, thus enabling imitation of the music by ear, or rely on close friends or relatives travelling abroad to bring recordings of new music back to the country.

As part of the new period of partial normalization and the cyclical liberalization of cultural life, the most important operas from 1960s explored the psychological dimensions of drama and human rights. This is particularly true of Hadjiev’s opera *The Masters* (1966), Krasimir Kyurkchiyski’s<sup>18</sup> *Yula* (a two–act psychological opera, staged in 1969), and Goleminov’s *The Icon Painter Zakhary* (premiered in 1972). Pipkov’s opera *Antigona 43* (1962, staged in 1963) brought Sophocles’ philosophical and ethical questions into the context of the antifascist struggle. The force of the drama is transferred through static, oratorio–like choral episodes and the chorus is used in the role of commentator. Lazar Nikolov’s *Prometheus Bound*, a chamber opera (oratorio) after Aeschylus (1969) was premiered in 1974. It is a clever work, “whose theme of ethical stoicism becomes a symbol of artistic dissidence under government dictatorship” (Kostakieva 1992: 638). The next two decades gave birth to many new operas by Simeon Pironkov, Dimitar Hristov (1933–2017), Bozhidar Spasov and others. Many of these operas included the artistic principles of satire, irony, parody and the grotesque, managing to distance themselves from the communist times.

The 1960s also brought a new era in Bulgarian jazz, starting with the composer, pianist, conductor and arranger Milcho Leviev (b. 1937). Conservatory–trained<sup>19</sup> Leviev worked as a pianist and director of the Bulgarian Radio and Television Big Band in the mid–1960s and was able to overcome some of the aesthetic conservatism of the totalitarian system. He straddled the boundaries of jazz and classical music and combined different genres and textures with a beguiling ability to navigate through them. His music is a successful synthesis of Bulgarian folklore and jazz. He founded “Focus 65” jazz quartet in 1965 and won the Critics’ Prize at the newly-

18 Krasimir Kyurkchiyski (1936–2011) graduated from the Sofia State Academy of Music in 1962, majoring in composition under Pancho Vladigerov. Later on, Kyurkchiyski studied at the Moscow Conservatoire with Dmitri Shostakovich. He made a name as an innovative writer of folksong arrangements and worked as a conductor of the “Philip Kutev” State Folk Ensemble orchestra and then as a conductor of the Choir at the Ensemble for Folk Songs of the Bulgarian National Radio, later known as “The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices”. Many of his works were performed in Italy, France, Russia, Germany, Australia and other countries.

19 Milcho Leviev studied at the Sate Academy of Music in Sofia with Pancho Vladigerov (composition) and Andrey Stoyanov (piano) and graduated in 1960.

founded Montreux Jazz Festival. Communist Bulgaria had given the musical genius an excellent education, but also brought him many problems. Leviev received an invitation from Don Ellis and left Bulgaria for Los Angeles in 1970 for political reasons. The composer lived and worked abroad for over 40 years and achieved professional acclaim on prestigious international music stages. He was allowed to perform in Bulgaria after 1980. Nowadays Leviev lives and works in Greece, seeking new paths in Balkan jazz.

According to all Bulgarian musicologists, the period from 1970 to 1990 should be regarded as having established a close connection between Bulgarian composers and the new trends in Europe/ European music. Born after World War II and familiar with modern trends, the composers Stefan Dragostinov (b. 1948), Emil Tabakov (b. 1947), Plamen Dzhurov (Djurov, b. 1949), Bozhidar Spasov (b. 1949), Alexandar Kandov (b. 1949), Rumen Baliozov (Balyozov, b. 1949), Yuliya Tzenova (also spelled Julia Cenova, or Zenova, 1948–2010), and Neva Krasteva (Krysteva, b. 1946) were able to create an individual style, independent from the totalitarian regime's realist aesthetic. Their work appeared in contemporary music forums around the world and won prestigious prizes.

## WRITING A NEW HISTORY OF MUSIC

The politicization of music during the period of totalitarian rule in Bulgaria is regarded as the main problem in the reassessment of national music history. All books written during the communist era strived to change or interpret music in relation to a socio-political ideology, and they are often seen as biased or limited today. Nowadays Bulgarian musicologists consider that the worst damage by the communist regime was done not to composers, but to national musical historiography. From a musicological point of view, the period between the two world wars was one of the most interesting and productive moments in the cultural and sociological history of Bulgaria. It is regrettable that it was the first period in the country's musical history that suffered from the Marxist ideology of art that dominated Bulgarian historiography for the second half of the twentieth century. It is true that in the first two decades after 1944 the "grand narrative" of history was ideologically narrowed and brought into line with the main principles of historical materialism to become a narrative of class struggle.

Furthermore, new books on the complete history of Bulgarian music were written only after the fall of communism. The first attempt belongs to the leading musicologist and Professor at the Sofia Academy of Music Ivan Hlebarov (1934–2015), in his book *The New Bulgarian Music Culture, Vol. i (1898–1944), Vol. ii (1944–1989)* (Sofia: State Music Academy Pancho Vladigerov, Hayni Publishing House, 2003:I, 2008: II). The writer was a witness to all that happened at this confused time and he has determined the "four waves of political terror" and repression against the Bulgarian music:

**1. 1937–1943.** The public discussion about Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1934)<sup>20</sup> in 1936 brought the discussion about Lyubomir Pipkov's opera *Yana's Nine brothers* (1932-37, staged in 1937) and other contemporary operas to Bulgaria. It took a long time for Bulgarian composers to write new operas. The writer stressed the ideological connection between the two totalitarian systems – Hitlerism and Stalinism.

**2. The period between 1948 and 1952** was “the first clash of Bulgarian socialist culture with totalitarian rule”. On 10 February 1948, the Soviet government issued a decree called “On the Opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli.” From then on, musical works in Bulgaria were to be labelled formalistic or realistic, depending on who wrote them and the whims of those in power at the time.

**3. 1958 – “The year of incoming hopes”.** In 1956, following Nikita Khrushchev's example, the Bulgarian Communist Party condemned Chervenkov's personality cult during its April plenum. Todor Zhivkov was appointed First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. There was hope and excitement within the intellectual circles that some fundamental changes would take place, such as more freedom of speech, increased contact with Western countries and greater liberty in the arts. This atmosphere of hope lasted until the Hungarian revolution in October 1956. It was during Zhivkov's tenure, in late 1956, that one of Bulgaria's most horrible concentration camps, Lovech, came into existence. Over the next years almost 200 musicians, journalists and peasants were beaten and tortured to death there.

**4. 1968 or “Fighting against the avant-garde”.** Radical political changes and crises occurred in Bulgarian music in 1968. According to Professor Ivan Hlebarov, it was “a time of summation and synthesis”, and its first symptom was the appearance of a work in the conflagration of new repression – Konstantin Iliev's *Fragmenti* (1968). *Fragmenti* set a precedent for new compositions in the neo-folk idiom, and its premiere in November 1968 showed that “in spite of all obstacles, artistic tendencies managed to open new paths”.

The young composers Konstantin Iliev, Lazar Nikolov, Georgi Tutev, Ivan Spasov, and Vasil Kazandzhiev were artists of protest; they had a hard time and their works were criticized by the communist regime and their older colleagues. The most brilliant of their compositions were performed at the Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music in Poland.

**5. The last year: 1988** or “Fighting against the monopoly” in Bulgarian music (Hlebarov 1997: 138, 114, 123-124; 1998).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century many new books were written, promoting a new approach to the Bulgarian music from the final decades of the twen-

20 Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* was premiered in 1934, and was used for a general denunciation of his music by the Stalinist regime. An anonymous article (sometimes attributed to Joseph Stalin) was published in *Pravda* in early 1936, and it laid out the grounds for the conviction and banishment of the opera in the Soviet Union until 1961.

tieth century. They study aspects of contemporary Bulgarian composers in relation to the European avant-garde, national traditions and the composers' spiritual self-expression from different perspectives.<sup>21</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Bulgarian Composers* was published in Bulgarian and English in 2003 by the Union of Bulgarian Composers (UBC). The current edition includes biographical details and a selected list of works of 262 Bulgarian composers connected with UBC's history and present-day development.

The rich musical history of Bulgaria is connected to its cultural, social, economic and political life. In this period of 45 years many new and very different works were composed; some of them were ironic and critical, others pathetic and validated the system, but all of them were signs of their times. These 45 years are not an isolated phenomenon; they are rooted in the democratic art of bourgeois Bulgaria and could be categorized chronologically. The neo-Romantic pathos found in Bulgarian music of the 1930s and 40s was replaced by an emphasis on folklore as the expression of a democratic aesthetic, particularly in genres such as mass songs, cantatas, oratorios, and other choral works. But composers continued to write symphonies, operas and chamber music; they wrote music in every major musical genre. The picture of the creative output of Bulgarian composers in the last decades of the twentieth century is so multifaceted that it is impossible to mention all the global trends, let alone the variety of individual, often contrasting artistic concepts. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many composers, from various generations, and performers who worked and lived in Bulgaria or abroad aimed to enable contemporary Bulgarian music and performance to gain international recognition.

## CONCLUSION

Since this is a phenomenon of recent times, the significance of the politicization of music during the period of totalitarian rule in Bulgaria (1944–1989) is still unexplored. A new approach to this dynamic period would clarify the overall development of Bulgarian musical culture in the twentieth century. To summarize, the various mechanisms, including significant local differences in every country, which were employed by institutions and the resultant manipulation of music were similar across totalitarian political systems in different countries of the Warsaw Pact. A comparative study of the actual impact of communist rule on musical composition in any country of the Soviet bloc during the early Cold War era and totalitarian regimes is still lacking. With access to archives, one can hope for even more detailed, analytical research in the future on the relationship between government authority and cultural and intellectual life during the communist era of Central, East-Central and Eastern Europe.

21 See Kratcheva 2001; Valdinova–Chendova 2003, 2004; Dachina 2004; Palieva 2006, etc.

## Music Examples

**ШУМЕТЕ, ДЕБРИ И БАЛКАНИ**  
Младен Исаев

**Бодро** Любомир Пипков

Шу- ме- те, де- бри и бал- ка- ни, шу-  
ме- те, вол- ни ле- со- ' ве! Ний  
н- дем бод- ри пар- ти- за- ни, на-

**Example 1**

*V chest na Velikiya Oktomvri* [In Honour of Great October], printed score of one and two-voice songs with accordion accompaniment (Sofia: Otdel Nauka i Izku-stvo, 1953:20-21).

**No 9.** Shumete debri i balkani “Whisper Nooks and Mountains”

Poetry by Mladen Isaev  
Music by Lyubomir Pipkov  
Spring 1944, first version

1. *Whisper nooks, crannies and mountains,  
Whisper majestic forests and woods.  
The proud partisans are coming,  
We are the people's true devoted sons.*

2. *Go to battle under pure flags,  
For the freedom of our home,  
Because ours, with the foreign Nazis,  
Trample on the poet Botev's land.*

ЗА СТРУНЕН ОРКЕСТЪР || POUR ORCHESTRE A C

**Allegro ma non tanto**

The image shows a page of a musical score for string orchestra. At the top, it is titled 'ЗА СТРУНЕН ОРКЕСТЪР || POUR ORCHESTRE A C'. Below the title, the tempo is marked 'Allegro ma non tanto'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Violini I, Violini II, Viole, Violoncelli, and Contrabassi. The second system continues the music for these instruments. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'div.' (divisi), 'f' (forte), 'p' (piano), 'unif.' (unifoni), and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The score is in two systems, with the first system showing the initial entry of the strings and the second system showing a change in texture and dynamics.

**Example 2**

Lazar Nikolov, *Concerto for String Orchestra* (1949), printed score, Sofia, Nauka i Izkustvo Publishing House, 1968.

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СТАНИМИРА ДЕРМЕНЦИЈЕВА

ПОЛИТИЗАЦИЈА МУЗИКЕ ТОКОМ РАЗДОБЉА ТОТАЛИТАРНЕ ВЛАСТИ У  
БУГАРСКОЈ (1944–1989)

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Овај чланак је усмерен на међусобни однос политичког режима, музичког живота у Бугарској и статута бугарских композитора у раздобљу између 1944 и 1989. У новије време, бројни чланци, конференцијски радови и докторске дисертације промовишу област културних студија и интердисциплинарни приступ, који се обједињују историја, политикологија и музикологија. Тиме је на нов начин осветљен репертоар остварења компонованих и извођених у поменутом периоду.

Након социјалистичке револуције у Бугарској 1944. године, социјалистички реализам постаје доминантна доктрина у музичким групама. ”Што је више међу људима, то је ближи животу!” гласила је нова идеологија. Током социјалистичког раздобља, уметности су биле финансиране (и регулисане) од стране цржаве, централизоване и снажно идеолошки усмерене. Уметници који нису били по вољи режиму били су елиминисани. Широм земље основане су нове оперске куће, симфонијски оркестри и средње музичке школе. Идеолошка ограничења нису нужно компромитовала уметничко изражавање, поготово током повремених периода либерализације (којима је дозвољена западноевропска књижевност и музика у Бугарској). Држава је такође контролисала Удружење бугарских композитора, производњу и дистрибуцију музичких албума и партитура, па чак и репертоар који се изводио у ресторанима. Композитори и музиколози су развијали нову соцреалистичку културу и промовисали бугарску музику у домаћим и интернационалним оквирима. Основани су нови фестивали бугарске музике, а бугарски фолклор је заменио неоромантичарски тренд карактеристичан за тридесете и четрдесете године ХХ века. Већини младих композитора и извођача није било дозвољено да студирају у иностранству, са изузетком Совјетског Савеза, нити да асимилију трендове савремене западноевропске музике. Након слома државног социјализма 1989. године, државна улагања у музику су смањена, те су појединци и ансамбли морали да се преоријентишу на тржишно пословање (док су у социјалистичком раздобљу плате и програми углавном били у надлежности Министарства културе).

Од почетка ХХИ века, бугарски композитори разних генерација, као и извођачи, било да живе у Бугарској или у иностранству, настоје да промовишу савремену бугарску уметничку музику на престижним светским сценама.

Кључне речи: музика, политички аспекти, Бугарска, историја ХХ века, бугарски композитори