3 Behind the Iron Curtain: Female Composers in the Soviet Bloc

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Working as a Female Composer in the Soviet Bloc

One of the strongest manifestations of the societal progress promised by Marxist Leninist ideology was the advocation of gender equality by state-socialist regimes. Article 122 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution declared that ‘women in the USSR are accorded equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life’, and asserted that the possibility of exercising these rights should be ensured via ‘state protection of the interests of mother and child, prematernity and maternity leave with full pay, and the provision of a wide network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens.’[1] This idealism was reflected in the changing demographics of the Soviet workforce in the 1930s. Women entered the workplace en masse to fulfil the demands of Stalin’s ambitious economic plans, often undertaking jobs involving heavy manual labour, which confounded traditional gender divisions. Indeed, such was the transformation of the position of women in the public sphere that images of the ‘new Soviet woman’ became synonymous, as Susan Reid has documented, with ‘the emancipation and rising living standards of the working people as a whole’.[2]

In the period after the Second World War, as Soviet-supported regimes consolidated power across Eastern Europe, the linking of gender equality with socialist progress continued apace. Women constituted 46 per cent of the workforce in the Soviet Union, for example, in 1956, and 49 per cent in 1964; in 1964 they also made up 53 per cent of students graduating from higher education.[3] Epitomising this trend was Valentina Tereshkova’s successful bid to be the first woman in space in June 1963. As Nikita Khrushchev declared at the celebrations in Moscow’s Red Square to mark her triumphant return to earth, Tereshkova was evidence ‘that women raised under socialism walk alongside men in all the people’s concerns, both in self-sacrificing labour and in heroic feats which amaze the world’.[4]

The biographies of some female composers from the Soviet Bloc can be read in terms of this narrative of emancipation. The East German composer Ruth Zechlin (1926–2007) is a case in point. Zechlin graduated from the Leipzig Conservatory in 1949, and was appointed the following year to teach composition, musicianship, and harpsichord at the newly founded music conservatory in East Berlin. She later recalled that this position had come her way because the men had either 'fallen in the war', were imprisoned, or had been prevented by conscription from studying and were thus not suitably qualified.[5] If she owed the launch of her career to the wartime decimation of East Germany's working-age male population, her subsequent trajectory reflected the possibilities open to women under state socialism. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Zechlin established herself as one of the GDR's foremost composers, and in interviews given later in her life was adamant that she had never experienced gender discrimination. As she remarked in 1992: 'My musical education was identical to that of a man. I did not have to accept any restrictions as a result of my gender. The living and working conditions for me as professor and composer were also completely similar to those of men.'[6] Zechlin was awarded the Kunstpreis der DDR (Art prize of the GDR) in 1965 and the prestigious Hanns-Eisler-Preis for her composition *Gedanken über ein Klavierstück von Prokofjew* (Reflections on a piano piece by Prokofiev, 1967) in 1968, and in 1969 she was promoted to a professorship at the conservatory, an appointment of which, as West German composer Erna Woll noted, 'female composers in the Federal Republic of Germany could only dream'.[7] Zechlin's place in the GDR's cultural pantheon was assured in 1970, when she was made a member of the East German Academy of the Arts and director of a masterclass of composition there.

Other female composers enjoyed similar successes within the socialist system. Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–69) deftly navigated the imposition of socialist realism in post-war Poland and was a central figure in the vibrant new music scene that emerged there during the 1950s, while Aleksandra Pakhmutova (b.1929) took a different route; after graduating from Vissarion Shebalin's masterclass in composition at the Moscow Conservatory, she embraced the role of state artist and emerged to prominence – she was purportedly Leonid Brezhnev's favourite composer – by writing official music to celebrate every conceivable achievement of the Soviet state. Yet if paths to a career in composition were more accessible to women in the Soviet Bloc than to their Western counterparts, such paths were by no means free of obstacles. The narratives of equality so central to socialist discourse often belied the perpetuation of more traditional constructs of gender difference.

The acceptance of women into the labour force did not, notably, lead to any significant feminisation of the public sphere. The new socialist personality was implicitly masculine; the images of women driving tractors and working in mines that proliferated in the 1930s were not accompanied by counter-images of men engaging in domestic labour. Moreover, in the workplace women continued, by and large, to be perceived as second-class citizens, with figures such as Tereshkova the exception rather than the rule. Women, as Donald Filtzer notes, 'formed the overwhelming majority of auxiliary workers doing heavy, manual and usually unskilled or semi-skilled labour'.[8] They were excluded from the upper echelons of power and decision making in politics, and were predominantly confined to lower and mid-range roles in professional occupations. Fundamentally, the ideal of the politician, the university professor, and the scientist continued to be conceived in the image of man. This trend was conspicuous where art was concerned; the romantic construct of the genius artist devoting himself exclusively to the production of great artworks was an enduring one.

Female composers were regularly confronted with, and also sometimes internalised these norms. The Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya (1919–2006) recalled how she was permitted to enter Shostakovich's masterclass at the Leningrad conservatory in 1940 'despite the rumour that Shostakovich usually does not accept young women in his class as he does not believe in their creative abilities'.[9] Ustvolskaya, in turn, appears to have replicated this conviction, purportedly preferring to teach male students in her own composition classes.[10] Zechlin welcomed both male and female students in her masterclasses; in an interview published in 1979, however, she claimed that her female students, despite their musicality, 'fail at a very particular point'. It becomes problematic, she claimed, 'when they have to bring what they have learned into a musical statement of their own'.[11] The reasons for this, she argued, were 'physiological': composition demanded a form of masculine intelligence that was alien to most women.[12] Speaking of her own abilities, which she believed she had inherited from her father, Zechlin explained: 'I consider this form of thinking, which I have not found so pronounced in any other woman, to be a masculine talent.'[13]

Compounding stereotypes of the male composer was the fact that socialist gender equality had not liberated women from the binds of domesticity. The failure of Soviet Bloc countries to account effectively for the labour of child-rearing and housework meant that many women found themselves performing two roles in society, the so-called double burden. The shortage of state-funded childcare was a continuous complaint, and the labour that women were expected to perform in the home impeded their advancement in the workplace. Moreover, the continued association of women with domesticity perpetuated the construct of a masculine public sphere within which women were cast in the role of other. Women composers had to work hard and often make significant personal sacrifices to succeed in this climate. Ustvolskaya had no children and shunned housework altogether; her husband Konstantin Bagrenin recalled that 'she never cooked and had no interest in any form of domesticity'.[14] Others managed in various ways to combine their creative lives with family. Bacewicz, who gave birth to a daughter in 1942, pondered how female composers might reconcile the labour of motherhood with creative work and concluded that she was fortunate in being in possession of 'a small, invisible motor which allows me to do in ten minutes what takes others an hour to do'.[15] 'A woman with composing abilities', she continued, 'can be a serious composer, can marry, have children, travel, and have adventures, and so on, on the condition she is in possession of this little motor. If, on the other hand, she does not have one, she needn't bother trying.'[16] Bacewicz's internal motor was notably assisted by her capacity to employ a housekeeper.[17] Zechlin, who also had one daughter, did likewise. Sofia Gubaidulina (b.1931), in contrast, did not have such resources at her disposal when she gave birth to her daughter Nadia while a student at the Moscow Conservatory in 1959. She suspended her composition work for the first year of her daughter's life and looked after her in a wooden house without running water in the Moscow outpost of Tomilino. At the end of the year, however, she returned to her dormitory in the conservatory while her parents brought Nadia up at their home in Kazan.

Decentring Socialist Aesthetics: Grażyna Bacewicz and Ruth Zechlin

The masculine orientation of the socialist public sphere was replicated in the aesthetics of socialist realism. Socialist realism, as Nina Noeske has detailed, retained the gendered norms of nineteenth-century romanticism and infused them with an additional layer of military rhetoric. Composers were encouraged to draw on the heritage of the revolutionary Beethoven rather than the feminine traditions of bourgeois domesticity, and to express their support for the socialist fight in large-scale 'public' forms depicting heroic struggle, or rousing mass songs.[18] Female composers were more than capable of contributing to this civic effort, and many did.

Ustvolskaya, for example, produced some textbook examples of socialist realism early in her career with works such as *Son Stepana Razina* (*The Dream of Stepan Razin*) for bass and orchestra, which was premiered by the Leningrad Philharmonic in 1949, and her Poem No. 1 ('The Hero's Exploit') for orchestra of 1959. *Stepan Razin*, which was written shortly after Zhdanov's formalist decree of 1948, celebrates with rousing folk tunes and heroic lyrical melodies the exploits of the seventeenth-century Cossack folk hero Stepan (or Stenka) Razin, who led Cossack and Russian peasants in a revolt against the aristocracy. Yet, while figures such as Ustvolskaya could write very effective music in state-approved models, it is perhaps unsurprising that the female composers who emerged most prominently from the Soviet Bloc, Ustvolskaya included, largely eschewed socialist realism in favour of more idiosyncratic, individual modes of expression.

Bacewicz is an interesting example in this regard. The oldest of the composers under discussion here, she was in her thirties by the time Poland came under Soviet occupation and had already been exposed to a wide variety of musical influences, French neoclassicism in particular. She studied composition at the Warsaw Conservatory with Kazimierz Sikorski, who was a student of Nadia Boulanger, and in 1932 she travelled to Paris to take lessons with Boulanger herself. A prodigious violinist and pianist, Bacewicz also studied violin with André Touret and Carl Flesch while in Paris, and returned to Poland in 1936 to take up the role of principal violinist of the Polish National Symphony Radio Orchestra. Over the course of the Second World War as performance opportunities became scarce, she focused increasingly on composition, and ceased performing in public altogether after suffering serious injuries in a car crash in 1954. By the time socialist realism was introduced to Poland in 1948, Bacewicz had already established herself as one of the country's foremost composers alongside Witold Lutosławski and Andrzej Panufnik. The imposition of Zhdanovian aesthetics from the Soviet Union did little to quash this trajectory. Indeed, the years between 1948 and 1955, when socialist realism was at its height in Poland, were the most productive of Bacewicz's career. Her Symphonies nos. 2–4, Concerto for String Orchestra, Violin Concertos nos. 3–5, Piano Concerto, Cello Concerto no. 1, String Quartets nos. 4–5, Quartet for 4 Violins, Piano Quintet no. 1, Violin Sonatas nos. 4–5, and Piano Sonatas nos. 1–2 all date from this period.

In many ways, the musical language that Bacewicz had evolved in the 1930s and early 1940s lent itself to socialist-realist expression. Her predilection for traditional forms and neoclassical sound worlds mapped well onto Zhdanovian ideals, as did her penchant for deploying folk tunes and folk-inspired melodies and inflections. Yet, as Adrian Thomas observes, these traits, rather than miring her in a world of musical propaganda, enabled her to steer 'an overtly non-programmatic path through the minefield of socialist realism'.[19] Bacewicz inscribed to some extent in her symphonies the heroic tropes of struggle and overcoming so beloved of socialist regimes. In her chamber music, however, she explored intimate sound worlds that sat incongruously with the public rhetoric of the socialist collective.

A striking example of Bacewicz's capacity to bring the private into the public sphere and write music that could speak simultaneously to different audiences is her fourth String Quartet. The work was commissioned by the Polish Composers' Union for submission to the annual international string quartet competition in Liège in 1951; Bacewicz won first prize in the competition, and was subsequently awarded a Polish state prize for the quartet in 1953. That her quartet had resonances both for the Western jury and Polish officials is a testament to the extent to which she maintained an idiosyncratic musical language within the tightening confines of post-war socialist realism. The first movement of the quartet is a case in point. It unfolds in what is essentially a traditional sonata-form structure and draws on folk music for its thematic content; yet it repeatedly subverts the sonata-form characteristics that were idealised within socialist-realist aesthetics. Its first theme has, as Thomas observes, 'all the appearance of a traditional second subject'.[20] Emerging out of an introspective andante introduction, it is a lyrical folk melody, which is presented in canon. This theme stands in stark contrast to the strident dissonant chordal passages that follow at various points in the movement. Bacewicz does not, however, reconcile these sound worlds, eschewing the expected dialectical resolution of sonata form.

Bacewicz's prominence in the early Polish People's Republic can be ascribed to a number of factors. Her status as a composer was undoubtedly augmented by her visibility as a performer; she was able to draw on a large network of colleagues to ensure her music was played, and she premiered many of her works herself. It was also arguably the case that her music represented an acceptable model for the output of a female composer. Her compositions are conservative for the 1950s, favouring traditional forms and structures; even her most dissonant works contain lyrical moments; and her compositional processes are generally free-form (instinctual) rather than rigorously controlled (rational). She followed her younger Polish colleagues in exploring serialism towards the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, but it was her experiments in timbre that resulted in the most distinctive music of her later years. Works such as *Pensieri notturni* (Night thoughts, 1961) employ unusual instrumental combinations and extended techniques to create shimmering textures not dissimilar to Bartók's night music.

Standing in many ways at the opposite end of the spectrum to Bacewicz was Zechlin, who perceived the practical manifestation of her 'masculine' composition gifts in her ability to control rigorously the sounds she produced. Of her approach, Zechlin explained: 'During the process of composing, I think predominantly linearly, although the harmonic intervals result by no means accidentally. They are planned and intended. This also applies to the orchestration . . . [the instruments are chosen for their] individually coloured sounds that do justice to my need for expression.'[21] This preoccupation with parameters of control reflects Zechlin's training as a harpsichordist and organist. She counted J. S. Bach amongst her foremost influences and frequently deployed polyphonic techniques, canons in particular, in her music. At the same time, her music was inherently experimental. Her compositions from the late 1960s onwards incorporate extreme dissonances, aleatory, and extended techniques. Moreover, her desire for control did not come at the expense of expression. On the contrary, the extent to which she controlled her material was paradoxically liberating, resulting in musical statements that could be profoundly lyrical, dramatic, and, occasionally, outright confrontational. Nowhere is the latter more evident than in her short organ piece, *Wider den Schlaf der Vernunft* (Against the sleep of reason), which she wrote to perform at an event in East Berlin's Erlöserkirche in October 1989 that was organised by leading members of the GDR's intelligentsia in support of the mass demonstrations that precipitated the fall of the Berlin Wall a month later. (Zechlin notably never paid with party membership for her compositional success in the GDR.) The piece takes its title from the Goya painting *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, and is characterised by a barrage of oppressive and insistent chord clusters. It is, as Zechlin herself explained, 'a very aggressive piece', intended 'to shake up and remind [listeners] that one must be wide awake now so as to ensure that the whole thing doesn't go in the wrong direction again'.[22]

Liminal Spaces: Galina Ustvolskaya and Sofia Gubaidulina

The disciplined expression of Zechlin's music finds certain parallels in the uncompromising mature aesthetic of Ustvolskaya. Ustvolskaya herself not only rejected any categorisations of her as a 'female' composer; she also confounded critics by positing a complete break – effectively a performance of patricide – between her and her male forefathers. She repeatedly renounced the influence of her own teacher Shostakovich and claimed to have evolved a musical language that was untouched by the legacy of earlier composers.[23] Certainly, her mature works, marked by pounding dissonances and incongruous instrumental combinations, owe little to socialist-realist traditions. Her music is loud, but it is the loudness of nihilism rather than heroism. Ustvolskaya's final decades in the Soviet Union were spent in self-imposed isolation. She retired from her teaching post at the Professional School of Music as soon as she reached the pensionable age of fifty-five in 1977, and withdrew into a life of reclusivity that challenged not only Soviet norms but also the gendered expectations of her Western critics. Dealing with the outside world through a small circle of supporters, including her husband Bagrenin, the composer and editor Viktor Suslin, and the pianist Oleg Malov, she refused to give interviews, often shutting down requests abruptly, and maintained extraordinarily tight control over performances of her music and the construction of her image.

Like many composers in the late Soviet Bloc, Ustvolskaya conceived of her music in the 1970s and 1980s as a form of spiritual expression; all of her works from this period, apart from the Piano Sonatas nos. 5 and 6, bear religious inscriptions. Her spirituality was not a refuge; this music speaks neither of consolation nor redemption. Ustvolskaya's god, with whom – eschewing the patriarchal conventions of organised religion – she claimed to commune directly, was clearly a wrathful god, standing in judgement rather than granting mercy. Characteristic is her Composition no. 2 'Dies irae', which she wrote between 1972 and 1973 and scored for the unsettling combination of piano, eight double basses, and a custom-made wooden cube struck by a hammer. The work consists of ten short sections, which offer little in the way of contrast or change of pace. The listener is bombarded throughout by a relentless march of piano clusters, *tutti* double-bass attacks, and ominous shotgun-like strikes of the hammer on the wooden cube.

Ustvolskaya argued that her ensemble music should not be considered as 'chamber music' in the conventional sense.[24] Indeed, in works such as Composition no. 2, there is little sense of concerted playing. She juxtaposes starkly opposing instruments – Composition no. 1 'Dona nobis pacem' (1970–1) is scored for piccolo, tuba, and piano, and Composition no. 3 'Benedictus, qui venit' (1974–5) for four flutes, four bassoons, and piano – and is not interested in finding resonances between them. On the contrary, each instrument or instrument grouping ploughs its own path, seemingly oblivious to the other sounds being made around it. Her five symphonies equally defy the ideals of coming together synonymous with the genre. Symphony no. 2 'True and Eternal Bliss!' (1979), for example, which is scored for choirs of six flutes (one doubling piccolo), six oboes, and six trumpets, is similar to Composition no. 2 both in its scoring of disparate instruments and in its treatment of these. Again the musical language is characterised by passages of rigidly paced pounding chords, clusters, and drum beats, which in this work alternate with a series of tense recitations. In the first three recitations the speaker releases guttural cries – a 'scream into space' as Ustvolskaya wrote on the autograph score of the work – and shouts the word 'Gospodi' (Lord). The fourth recitation starts similarly, but then the speaker begins to utter the words from Hermannus Contractus's 'De sanctissima Trinitate' that give the symphony its title: '*istinnaya i blagaya vechnost, vechnaya zhe i blagaya istina, istinnaya i vechnaya blagost*' ('true and blissful eternity, eternal and blissful truth, true eternal bliss'). Against these words, the instruments finally begin to function as an ensemble, coming together to form long sustained chords with a timbral quality akin to that of an organ. The evocation of eternal bliss is transitory, however. The speaker returns at the end to his cries into the abyss for 'Gospodi'. The only response is an echo, a gently wailing piccolo line, which along with solitary piano notes, brings the piece to a close.

Ustvolskaya drew again on Hermannus's text in each of her subsequent symphonies, which she titled 'Jesus, Messiah, Save Us!' (Symphony no. 3, 1983), 'Prayer' (Symphony no. 4, 1985–7), and 'Amen' (Symphony no. 5, 1989–90) respectively. An eleventh-century monk, mathematician, and music theorist, Hermannus was paralysed and could speak only with difficulty, a state of existence that possibly resonated with Ustvolskaya's own self-imposed isolation. The tortured soundscapes of her late works have been explained in various ways by music critics: they are the response of a 'victim' of Soviet oppression, a response to the collective trauma of Soviet history, or to the failed ideals of socialism.[25] Ustvolskaya herself had little to say about politics. She did, however, describe her works as 'the fruit of my tormented life',[26] a statement that has particular resonances in the context of the penultimate composition in her catalogue, her Piano Sonata no. 6 (1988). The sonata is a terse, one-movement work in which tightly controlled blocks of material, made up of carefully prescribed piano clusters, are subject to motoric permutations and repetitions. The rigid compositional processes driving the work are notably countered by the visceral somatic discomfort that the piece induces both in the listener and, in particular, the performer, who has to play the barrage of clusters at four and five *forte* markings throughout. Ustvolskaya, as Maria Cizmic insightfully observes, creates 'a music space in which pain becomes visibly known'.[27]

Gubaidulina's compositions similarly combine the rational and the irrational, the cerebral and the somatic. Like that of Ustvolskaya, her music is profoundly spiritual; she was baptised in the Orthodox Church in 1970 and has frequently since composed works on religious themes. Her spirituality is not, however, as cataclysmic as Ustvolskaya's; her music suggests the possibility of redemption and peace. Ustvolskaya and Gubaidulina are examples of the very different ways of being – on personal and musical levels – that were possible in the more individualised societies of the late Soviet Bloc. Neither composer was dissident; both, however, forged distinctive aesthetics that were opposed – in quite distinct ways – to the collective ideals of state socialism. Like many of her Soviet contemporaries, Gubaidulina began experimenting with serialism and other formal compositional processes in the 1960s, when the grip of socialist realism loosened its tenacious hold on the state. She did not, notably, associate systematic compositional processes with rational expression. Serialism, for Gubaidulina, represented freedom rather than constraint; as Peter Schmelz observes, serialism was synonymous for her with 'the perfect, limitless order of the beyond'.[28] Gubaidulina adopted formalistic processes, which included operations involving rhythm and duration, not as an abstract means of control but as a way of evoking contrasts between sacrifice and redemption, between the worldly and otherworldly. Her concerto for violin and orchestra, *Offertorium* (1980), is a case in point. It opens with the theme of Bach's *Musical Offering*, which is presented initially in D minor and distributed pointillistically across individual instruments of the orchestra. All but the final note of the theme are sounded in this first statement. A series of variations then follows in which the theme is 'sacrificed'. A note is removed from the beginning and end of each statement until all that remains in the tenth variation is the E pitch from the centre of the theme. After an extended violin cadenza, the theme is gradually rebuilt in the third section of the piece, emerging redeemed in the process. It returns in full in the coda, notably stated now in retrograde and played in its entirety by the solo violin rather than being treated pointillistically.

Gubaidulina was particularly intrigued by the possibilities inherent in the Fibonacci sequence and the associated golden ratio. Discussing her use of it in an interview with Vera Lukomsky, she observed: 'I like this system because it does not deprive me of my freedom, does not limit my fantasy'.[29] She also perceived it to have restorative effects. With regard to her 1993 composition *Jetzt immer Schnee* (Now always snow), she noted: 'I experience the material [in this piece] as very aggressive substance . . . I call this an illness. The material requires the artist to find a solution for healing the pain.' This solution, she claimed, could be found in the Fibonacci series; she could 'heal the material' by deploying it to resolve 'dissonance to consonance with regard to time proportions'.[30] A good example of how she applied the sequence in practice can be observed in her symphonic work *Stimmen . . . Verstummen . . .* (Voices . . . fall silent . . .) of 1986. This twelve-movement composition juxtaposes two diametrically opposed sound worlds. The odd movements nos. 1, 3, 5, and 7, which depict the 'eternal' and are characterised by shimmering, ethereal soundscapes that centre initially on a D-major triad, are composed according to the Fibonacci sequence. The 'earthly', meanwhile, is evoked by the even movements nos. 2, 4, 6, and 8, which are freely composed and full of chromatic writing, dissonance, and often harsh timbres. Over the course of the work, the heavenly visions grow progressively shorter as each successive odd-numbered movement decreases in length in proportion with the Fibonacci sequence: movement 1 lasts 55 quavers; movement 3 lasts 34 quavers; movement 7 lasts 21 quavers, and movement 7 lasts 13 quavers leading to an extended silence (zero quavers) in the ninth movement.[31] Conversely the earthly movements get successively longer, culminating in the 'apocalypse' of the eighth movement, which is replete with aleatoric passages and intrusive polytonal chords. The silence that follows in the ninth movement instigates a rebirth of the eternal. The conductor gesticulates throughout the silence, following a choreography of arm patterns that are determined, again, by the Fibonacci sequence and lead to a G-major triad on the organ, which evokes 'eternal light'.[32] The alternation of eternal and earthly returns in movements 10 to 12. Now, however, the even rather than odd movements are eternal, and the work closes with a return to the shimmering D-major chord of the opening.

Unlike that of Ustvolskaya, Gubaidulina's spirituality did not involve a rejection of the world around her. Her existence in the late Soviet Union was in many ways a liminal one; as was the case with her close colleagues Alfred Schnittke and Edison Denisov, few of her works were performed in state-sanctioned venues. Yet, she was far from isolated, playing an active role in Moscow's lively unofficial music scene. She was a founding member of the improvisation ensemble Astreya, together with Suslin and Vyacheslav Artyomov. She was also acutely attuned to the gendered norms of socialist politics and aesthetics. She saw advantages in her status as a female composer. As she explained to Gerald McBurney, she had more freedom to experiment than figures such as Schnittke: ‘Nobody took much notice of me. They could always dismiss what I did as simply female eccentricity. It was much harder for the men.’[33] Yet she also sought to confront the hegemony of masculine tropes in socialist realism and Western art music more generally. She viewed as anachronistic, for example, the traditional opposition in concertos of soloist and orchestra, with the soloist as hero leading the orchestra (the ‘crowd’ or ‘army’) to victory. In reality, she explained, ‘the hero is disappointed in everything, nobody knows what the truth is’.[34] Accordingly, in her own piano concerto, *Introitus* (1978), she wrote a solo part that ‘is purely meditative, completely deprived of virtuosity’.[35] She likewise exposed the Soviet fallacy of the collective or crowd as an inherently positive force. In *Chas Dushi* (Hour of the soul), which she composed for wind orchestra and mezzo soprano in 1974 and later revised for percussion, orchestra, and mezzo soprano, she invoked the suppression of the poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941), who committed suicide after being ostracised by the Soviet state. Tsvetaeva’s soul is represented in the work by the solo percussion part, written for Mark Perkarsky, which dominates the first section of the piece. This is opposed midway by a polystylistic section, in which Gubaidulina quotes snippets of what she describes as ‘popular and patriotic songs, representing vulgarity and the aggressiveness of the common crowd as bred by the Soviet system’. ‘Vulgarity and aggressiveness’, she expounds, ‘are the murderers that killed the poet.’[36] Notably, Gubaidulina sees the percussion as depicting the ‘dominant masculine, side’ of Tsvetaeva’s personality.[37] The poet’s feminine side appears only at the end of the work, after her death via polystylism, when the mezzo soprano, who has been hiding in the orchestra until this point, emerges to sing Gubaidulina’s setting of the poem that gives the work its title. The expression of femininity was possible only when the socialist collective had been silenced, in this case via an extensive tom-tom solo.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the silencing of the socialist collective was not a prerequisite for the emergence of female composers in the Soviet Bloc. If the realities of female emancipation did not live up to the utopian ideals that were promised by state-socialist regimes, the opportunities that were created for women, and the expectations across the Soviet Bloc of what women could achieve, surpassed those in the West. Female composers were confronted continuously in the Soviet Bloc by an aesthetic discourse and sociopolitical values from which they were excluded by virtue of their gender. This confrontation was at times oppressive. Yet, as the women in this chapter demonstrate, it could also inspire profound creativity. Inadvertently, the hyper-masculine climate of socialist realism set the scene for a host of distinct female musical voices to emerge.

Notes

1. Available at www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/12/05.htm (accessed 11 December 2020).
2. Susan E. Reid, 'All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, vol. 57 (1998), 137.
3. Melanie Ilič, 'Women in the Khrushchev Era: An Overview', in Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 7–8.
4. Cited in Sue Bridger, 'The Cold War and the Cosmos: Valentina Tereshkova and the First Woman's Space Flight', in Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 231.
5. Beate Philipp, *Komponisten der neuen Musik* (Kassel: Furore-Verlag, 1993), 135.
6. Ibid., 134.
7. Ibid., 73.
8. Donald Filtzer, 'Women Workers in the Khrushchev Era', in Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 30.
9. Elena Nalimova, 'Demystifying Galina Ustvolskaya: Critical Examination and Performance Interpretation' (PhD thesis, University of London, Goldsmiths, 2012), 57.
10. Ibid., 100.
11. Ursula Stürzbecher, *Komponisten in der DDR: 17 Gespräche* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1979), 151.
12. Ibid., 153.
13. Ibid., 155.
14. Cited in Nalimova, 'Demystifying Galina Ustvolskaya', 227.
15. Grażyna Bacewicz, trans. Anna Clarke and Andrew Cienski, *A Distinguishing Mark* (Orleans, Ontario: Krzys Chmiel, 2004), 21.
16. Ibid., 22.
17. Ibid., 56–7.

18. Nina Noeske, ‘Gender Discourse and Musical Life in the GDR’, in Elaine Kelly and Amy Wlodarski (eds.), *Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 179–82.
19. Adrian Thomas, *Polish Music since Szymanowski* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71.
20. Ibid., 73.
21. Philipp, *Komponisten der neuen Musik*, 129.
22. Gabriele Mittag, ‘“Also, bestimmte Dinge . . . waren einfach verboten”: Interview mit der Komponisten Ruth Zechlin’, *TAZ*, 3 February 1990, 33; available at https://taz.de/!1782000/(accessed 11 December 2020).
23. See, for example, Thea Derks, ‘Galina Ustvolskaya: “Sind Sie mir nicht böse!” (Very Nearly an Interview)’, *Tempo*, vol. 193 (1993), 33.
24. See http://ustvolskaya.org/eng/creativity.php (accessed 11 December 2020).
25. For an overview of this critical reception, see Simon Morrison, ‘Galina Ustvolskaya: Outside, Inside, and Beyond Music History’, *Journal of Musicology*, vol. 36 (2019), 96–129.
26. Available at http://ustvolskaya.org/eng/creativity.php.
27. Maria Cizmic, *Performing Pain: Music and Trauma in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93.
28. Peter Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.
29. Vera Lukomsky, ‘“Hearing the Subconscious”: Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina’, *Tempo*, vol. 209 (1999), 30.
30. Ibid., 29.
31. See Lukomsky, ‘Hearing the Subconscious’, 30–1.
32. Ibid., 31.
33. Gerald McBurney, ‘Encountering Gubaydulina’, *The Musical Times*, vol. 129 (1988), 121.
34. Vera Lukomsky, ‘“The Eucharist in My Fantasy”: Interview with Sofia Gubaidulina’, *Tempo*, vol. 206 (1998), 29.
35. Ibid., 30.
36. Ibid., 31.
37. See Claire Polin, ‘Conversations in Leningrad, 1988’, *Tempo*, vol. 168 (1989), 19; and Lukomsky, ‘The Eucharist in My Fantasy’, 31.

Further Reading

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