15 Serialism in the USSR

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Serialism prompted sharply divergent responses from composers, listeners, and arts officials in the Soviet Union. Ukrainian composer Valentyn Sylvestrov remembered being struck by Anton Webern's Concerto for Nine Instruments (1931–4) in the early 1960s:

> [It] immediately astonished me. When I heard it, I had the feeling that I was listening to music perpendicularly. Such a naïve impression from an unknowing listener . . . Because despite all of their innovations, the ear still associated both Schoenberg and Berg with the nineteenth century. But from Webern there immediately was the sense of a completely new world. (Sil'vestrov and Munipov 2017)

His colleague Vitaly Godzyatsky remarked about the same period:

> At the time we sought out physicists because only they understood us. And also artists and, perhaps, even to a greater degree, people involved with film. They asked us to write music for their documentaries: 'Give me something strange. We have the cosmos, electrons, the antiworld – Verdi won't work'. It turned out that they were already people with contemporary psychologies who didn't dwell on the idea that music should necessarily be 'pretty'. (Andrusik 2017)

Despite the attraction to listening perpendicularly among these young Soviet composers and their audiences, prettiness, and wide accessibility, remained vital categories for arts officials in the USSR, who often weighed in on serialism in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, when it was usually referred to in both specialist and non-specialist publications as dodecaphony, an esoteric word that further highlighted its strangeness and foreignness. No louder critic emerged than Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, who declared in 1963:

> But it seems that among our creative workers there are young people who are eager to prove that melody in music has lost its right to exist and that it ought to be replaced by some new kind of music, dodecaphonic music, music of noises. A normal person finds it difficult to understand what is hidden behind the word dodecaphonic, but in all probability it is the same as cacophonic. Well, this cacophonic music we totally reject. Our people cannot include such trash in our

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ideological armament. . . . We need music that inspires, that calls for heroic deeds and for constructive labor. (Khrushchev 2001: 954)

As the transcript of these remarks notes, members of the audience were in full agreement, shouting 'right!' as Khrushchev reached the peak of his indignation.

Khrushchev was not alone in his dismissal of serialism. Two years earlier composer and critic Sergey Aksyuk had singled out a specific Soviet composer and a specific composition for roiling the waters, using the typically extravagant invective of music criticism in the USSR:

All the more distressing are those rare yet unpleasant creative failures, when some of our youth get carried away with fashionable bourgeois tendencies, with dodecaphonic music, and 'experiment' in the swamp, soiling themselves in the scum of dead dogmas and schemas. Thus [Andrey] Volkonsky's [piano composition] *Musica Stricta* [1956–7] did not give pleasure to listeners, for although talented, he has already been held back for far too long in the stuffy atmosphere of hopeless modernistic explorations. (Aksiuk 1961)

Needless to say, such criticisms mounted over the course of the 1960s as serialism became more pervasive among young Soviet composers and theorists. 'So what is it: a technique or an ideology?' composer Dmitri Kabalevsky asked with feigned innocence in 1965. A member of his audience shouted: 'A technique!' 'No,' shouted Kabalevsky, 'it is not a technique! A system that is incompatible with the art of the people is not a technique but an ideology!' (Vlasova 2014: 107). Technique or ideology? Music or politics? The categories were intertwined, mutually reinforcing. Denying ideology itself became an ideology, a variant of the ideology of absolute music. Decades later, the unrepentant Volkonsky told musicologist Elena Dubinets: 'All of my life was a protest against Soviet power. And dodecaphony served that purpose, although not it alone. It wasn't a political act; it was a musical action. In the USSR we wanted to write music that did not resemble socialist realism' (quoted in Dubinets 2010: 61).

Despite some twelve-tone experimentation in the 1920s by Ukranian or Russian composers both at home and abroad (including, for instance, Nikolai Roslavets, Yefim Golyshev, and Nicolas Obouhow), serialism arose in the USSR only some three decades later, in the middle of the 1950s, with the Geneva-born, repatriated Volkonsky its first practitioner (see Kholopov 1999; Kholopov 1983; Bazayev 2009; Gojowy 1980; Gojowy and Kolesnikov 2001; Segall 2018). It was imported. And as an import, it roused fascination and suspicion in equal measure. Twelve-tone music in

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the USSR was both curiosity and compositional plaything. But it was also a serious tool with which composers earnestly tried to create art of contemporary significance and relevance. It entered an environment of musical poverty buffeted by waves of abundance, or hints of abundance, from abroad, conveyed and broadcast by a variety of witting and unwitting messengers (Schmelz 2020). The stark aesthetic framework of the time initially forced composers, listeners, performers, critics, and cultural watchdogs to make a choice between decisive rejection or open-armed embrace. More refined appropriations became possible only gradually, later.

The engagement by Soviet musicians, critics, and listeners of all persuasions with serial methods of all persuasions is one of the clearest signs of the worldwide dominance and prestige of serial techniques in the later 1950s and 1960s well beyond Western Europe and the United States (*pace* Straus 1999a; see Schmelz 2010). Along with jazz, serialism was a valuable export commodity in the cultural Cold War between the USA and the USSR, and in some cases, in both countries, the two (jazz and serialism) went hand in hand.

In the USSR, serial music was as contested as it was anywhere else in the post-war era. Perhaps more so, for as the statements quoted above by Khrushchev, Aksyuk, and Kabalevsky indicate, the stakes were higher. Khrushchev probably was the only world leader of his stature to comment on serial music at that, or any other, time. In the United States, neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy ever weighed in on musical techniques, nor did Johnson or Nixon. In the United States, it remained the remit of composers, for as Milton Babbitt famously argued, these highly intellectualised compositional approaches were ill suited for the popular marketplace and consequently belonged among specialists in the academy (Babbitt 1958; Peyser 1969). In the USSR, by contrast, serial music was debated as a social good by composers, performers, critics, and arts authorities. What role could and should this music play in this (or any other) society? What did (or could) these unfamiliar sounds mean? Serialism's increasing use in the Soviet Union over the late 1950s and after raised basic questions about influence and originality, about meaning, form, and content, and about self and other.

The serial techniques that provoked such ferocious debate, generated by composers compelled, as Sylvestrov admitted, by a blend of youthful inexperience, naïveté, ambition, and enthusiasm, were deemed by arts officials and more conservative writers to have failed on almost all fronts (even though some of them later tried their own hands at them).

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Composers and, especially, sympathetic audiences, such as the physicists and film-makers Godzyatsky praised, heard serialism as a demonstration of aesthetic, and by extension sociopolitical, freedom. But these listeners were ill equipped to judge musical details. A composition's overall avant-garde aura, or, as important, the avant-garde aura of its creators and performers, the venue in which it was heard, as well as the other listeners it attracted – its 'scene' – mattered most of all (Schmelz 2009, 179–215).

Soviet officials such as Khrushchev, Aksyuk, and Kabalevsky publicly and privately condemned serialism for focusing too narrowly on form instead of content, even as foreign critics complained Soviet serial composers merely imitated (in a rudimentary fashion) better known (to them) Western examples (Brody and Oncley 1968; Henahan 1980). The writers of serial music in the USSR could not win, just as any creator at the periphery of a global marketplace dominated by the centre cannot win: the rules were stacked against them. Because of these divergent forces, as well as their own creative evolution, most of the young Soviet composers who experimented so eagerly with serial techniques in the early and mid-1960s had moved on to other approaches by the end of the decade. Serialism acted as a crucial proving ground as they developed their own personal compositional voices.

The remainder of the introductory overview that follows is by no means exhaustive. It instead briefly discusses serialism's varied formal and sociopolitical meanings and implications – its aesthetics and, to a lesser degree, its mechanics – in the USSR, by examining the central figures in Soviet serialism and by pointing to representative compositions, performances, publications, and recordings (see Schmelz 2009). This chapter is particularly concerned with the aural culture of serialism in the post-war USSR as well as with thinking about serialism as both performative presence and material artifact.

Soviet Serialism, Exported

In 1968, the West German publisher Gerig, based in Cologne, issued a two-volume set called *New Soviet Piano Music* (*Neue Sowjetischen Klaviermusik*), one of the first publications of Soviet serial music outside the USSR. Edited by Rudolf Lück, these volumes offer an invaluable encapsulation of Soviet serialism near the end of its period of greatest fascination and contention. Alongside non-serial compositions for children in the first volume by Dmitri Kabalevsky, Aram Khachaturyan,

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Georgi Sviridov, and the less-known Estonian composer Anti Marguste, the fifteen short compositions in the collection include several influential compositions from the history of Soviet serialism written by key figures in its development, sampling as well its wide geographic reach – Estonian, Armenian, Ukrainian, and Russian: Arvo Pärt, Arno Babadjanian, Valentyn Sylvestrov, Alfred Schnittke, Edison Denisov, Vitaly Godzyatsky, and Alemdar Karamanov, as well as Dmitri Shostakovich (although his 1927 *Aphorisms* excerpted in volume 2 are an early, non-serial grouping) (see Table 15.1).

There were notable omissions, which will be discussed further below: Volkonsky, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Nikolai Karetnikov, to name just three. (All the composers in the collection are men.) The absence of these composers was not for lack of trying: Ukrainian conductor Igor Blazhkov, Evgeny Mravinsky's assistant with the Leningrad Philharmonic from 1963 to 1968 and a principal driver for new music creation, performance, and export in the USSR during the 1960s (and after), tried to convince the West Germans to include more adventurous material, including Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta,* Volodymyr Zahortsev's *Rhythms* (*Ritmy*,

Table 15.1 Music in Rudolf Lück (ed.), *Neue Sowjetische Klaviermusik*. Cologne: Gerig, 1968

Book 1
Reinhold Gliere (1875–1956), 'Song from the East' ('Vostochnaia pesen'', 'Lied aus dem Osten', op. 30, no. 10)
Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904–87), 'Ball Game' ('Ballspiel', *Thirty Pieces for Children*, op. 27, no. 5)
Aram Khachaturyan (1903–78), 'Lyado Is Sick' ('Liado zabolel'', from *Detskii al'bom*, vol. 1, 1926–47)
Georgiy Sviridov (1915–98), 'Little Toccata' ('Malenkaia tokkata', No. 13 from *Al'bom dlia detei*, 1948)
*Arvo Pärt (b. 1935), Toccatina and Fughetta (from *Partita,* op. 2, 1958)
Anti Marguste (1931–2016), 'The Weasel' no. 3, from *Preludes for Piano* (*Prelüüdid klaverile*, op. 1, 1955)
Vladimir Tsytovich (1931–2012), Prelude no. 4, from *Ten Preludes* (1963)
Nodar Mamisashvili (b. 1930), Prelude no. 1, 'Whole-Tone Scales' (1965)
*Arno Babadjanian (1921–83), Picture no. 4, 'Intermezzo', from *6 Pictures* (1965)
*Valentyn Sylvestrov (b. 1937), 'Serenade', from *Triad* (1962)
Book 2
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75), *Aphorisms*, nos. 1. Recitative, 2. Serenade, 3. Nocturne, 4. Elegy, 8. Canon, 9. Legend, 10. Lullaby (op. 13, 1927)
*Alfred Schnittke (1934–98), *Variations on a Chord* (1965)
*Edison Denisov (1929–96), *Variations* (1961)
*Vitaly Godzyatsky (b. 1936), *Ruptures of Flatness* (1963)
*Alemdar Karamanov (1934–2007), *Prologue, Idea, and Epilogue* (*Prolog, mysl' i epilog*, 1962 or 1963)

* Indicates serial composition or work by a later serial composer

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1967–9), and more of Sylvestrov's *Triad* (1962), for Lück had included only the second of its three movements (Schmelz 2015: 211). Yet as his primary correspondent in the matter, musicologist Fred Prieberg, told him, Gerig wanted to include easier compositions by safer composers to offset the more adventurous offerings, thereby currying favour both with the music-buying German public and the Soviet authorities (Schmelz 2015: 211–12). In its transmission and dissemination abroad, the Lück volumes were very much of their time and place, a document reflecting the contentious (and far from clear-cut) back and forth of the cultural Cold War. Regardless, for Western European and Anglo-American audiences it helped solidify a still-forming canon of new music in the USSR (Schmelz 2017).

The Lück collection engages with how to play and teach serial music: arranged in order of progressive difficulty, it had pedagogical intent. Yet it also engaged with how to hear serial music. The movement from compositions for children to abstract serial compositions is gradual, inviting programmatic connections between Khachaturyan's "Lyado Is Sick" – a portrait of an ailing, bored child – and Godzyatsky's *Ruptures of Flatness* (1963), not in their specifics but in the indication of a programme – a story of some sort – behind each. The more orthodox and the more avant-garde compositions also share generic similarities. The subtitle of Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta*, his first serial composition – and the first in the post-war USSR – was 'fantasia ricercata', and many of the other early serial experiments in the USSR used neutral generic labels, as was the case in the Lück volume with Schnittke's *Variations on a Chord* (1965) and Denisov's *Variations* (1961) or Sylvestrov's 'Serenade' from his *Triad*, itself an ironic, ambiguous name, given that only flickers of conventional tonal triads appear in this section of the composition. Although Pärt's Toccatina and Fughetta from his early Partita are not serial, they point the way to the serial experiments in his later Symphony no. 1, 'Polyphonic' (1963–4), whose two movements are called, respectively, 'Canons' and 'Prelude and Fugue' (cf. Schmelz 2002: 233–41; Schmelz 2009: 222–5). Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta*, an absent presence hovering over the entire compendium, concludes with a toccata in all but name, as does the final movement in Sylvestrov's 'Serenade' in the Lück collection (Schmelz 2009: 84–88). As in the early serial compositions by Schoenberg, Webern, and others, neoclassical attributes – fugues, toccatas, canons, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century arrangements of melody and accompaniment, or, at an even more basic level, familiar patterns of textual and dynamic tension and release, thickening and thinning – structured serialism's otherwise novel techniques (if not its ideology) in the USSR.

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Contemporary Soviet listening guides for these ancestral gestures and genres provide some help in hearing the music in Lück's collection historically. Sviridov's 'Little Toccata' (1948) appeared on an LP recorded by pianist Dmitri Blagoy just a few years after the Lück collection, in 1971. Blagoy prefaced each movement of Sviridov's group of children's pieces with a brief introduction for his young listeners. Before the Toccata, Blagoy said:

> You may not understand the name of the next piece, 'Little Toccata' . . . It means a virtuosic musical composition that is difficult to play, maintaining a quick, steady, precise motion. Even as such the piece that you will now hear has its own content/meaning [*soderzhanie*]. The composer said nothing about this, simply leaving it up to the imagination of the listener. (Sviridov 1971)

If the first compositions in the Lück collection had clear 'contents' thanks to their descriptive titles – the wandering harmonies of the sick child in Khachaturyan's composition, or the ball playing in Kabalevsky's, to say nothing of Marguste's animal portrait or Gliere's evocation of the imaginary East (a familiar – to Western ears – exoticised Russia) – the meanings of the later compositions were more opaque.

Blagoy left the interpretation of Sviridov's innocuous Toccata to the imaginations of his young listeners. Yet when renowned, provocative pianist Maria Yudina first played Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta* at Moscow's Gnesin Institute on 6 May 1961, she gave her (adult) audience firm instructions: 'This composition is very difficult, and you might not understand it after hearing it once, therefore I will play it twice. I ask you not to applaud after the first time' (quoted in Pekarsky 2007: 25; see also Schmelz 2009: 90–1). Rather than inviting listeners to rely on their imaginations, she invited them to suspend judgement. Historian Jacques Barzun made a similar exhortation in a *locus classicus* of the post-war modernist attitude towards the audience, when he addressed listeners in New York, within days of Yudina's Moscow performance. At the opening concert of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Studio held at Columbia University in New York City on 9 and 10 May 1961, Barzun declared: 'I suggest . . . that we are not here to like or approve but to understand' (Barzun 1964). Despite their very different social, political, and economic systems, Barzun's and Yudina's audiences had some characteristics in common. Both Barzun and Yudina spoke to select, in-the-know listeners. And both audiences were in retreat, one from over-accessible commercialism, one from sociopolitical control that enforced its own over-accessible aesthetics. Notwithstanding Yudina's exhortation, like those at Columbia

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University at the early May 1961 concerts, dedicated audiences in the USSR sought to hear serial compositions precisely because they were new, different, and difficult. They were inaccessible on many levels (practically and, often, musically), but as a result they represented freedom, a freedom felt rather than understood. In a 1967 article about Sylvestrov in the Soviet youth magazine *Iunost'*, the author reacted with surprise: 'All the music by Sylvestrov that I heard was very contemporary and new in terms of its technical and expressive means, but my attention did not concentrate on that newness: while listening, I sensed freedom, simplicity, naturalness. Exactly the naturalness of this music surprised me' (Gorbanevskaia 1967).

Learning, Theorising, and Analysing 'Naturalness'

'Naturalness' was a watchword in aesthetic debates about serialism in the Soviet Union. Serial composers insisted their music was 'natural'; their opponents, by contrast, insisted it was an abomination of 'normal' – that is, tonal – musical practice. The most committed serial advocates and interpreters – theorists such as Yuri Kholopov, Mikhail Tarakanov, and Edison Denisov – treated serialism as an innocuous tendency and in many cases framed it as an understandable outgrowth of tonal practice, something that could be discussed without raised voices (see Tarakanov 1968; Tarakanov 1966a; Tarakanov 1966b; Denisov 1969; Denisov 1999; Kholopov 1983; Schmelz 2008: 507–15; Segall 2018). For them, 'naturalness' also meant normal, with connotations of coolness, dispassion, and objectivity. The culture of serial analysis in the USSR developed slowly and belatedly because most of these scores were published only after a lengthy delay, or not at all; many remain difficult to obtain to the present day. Recordings were few and far between, circulating largely as *magnitizdat*, surreptitiously distributed bootlegs. Aural apprehension remained the prime approach to analysis and, in the Soviet Union (as elsewhere around the world), for most listeners the technical specifics of serial compositions mattered little.

Soviet and, later, Russian theorists even came to use a term that spoke volumes. They called the overarching category of composition not serialism but 'twelve-toneness' (*dvenatsatitonovost'*), of which both serialism and dodecaphony were considered subsets (Kurbatskaia 1996; Schmelz 2004: 324–6; Cairns 2012). Elsewhere, I have described the theoretical hierarchy they developed as the Soviet serial bullseye (Schmelz 2009: 135; see also Cairns 2012: 115–16). This arrangement of concentric circles has dodecaphony as its middle point – a set arrangement of all twelve pitches of

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the chromatic scale that governs every pitch (or nearly every pitch) in a composition. (Multiple or integral serialism is, in this context, a specific subset related to this category as well as to the particular Russian understanding of serialism.) Moving outwards, the other circles become progressively looser: serialism consists of a set arrangement (a row) of fewer than twelve pitches that determines the content of a composition; 'twelve-tone' (distinct from dodecaphonic) consists of multiple, non-determinative twelve-tone rows within a single composition; and the outer circle, atonal or 'twelve-tonish' indicates music that sounds like but is not strictly twelve-tone. To further muddy the waters, Svetlana Kurbatskaya, a pathbreaking theorist of Russian serial practice, presents an additional six categories of 'twelve-toneness', most based on the practice of specific composers (Kurbatskaia 1996: 32–40; Cairns 2012).

The compositions in the Lück collection range across the serial bullseye. The first serial (in the Western sense) composition in the volume is Babadjanian's dodecaphonic (in the Soviet sense) 'Intermezzo', part of his *Six Pictures* (*Shest' kartin* (1965)), the first serial composition from the USSR to be recorded and released on LP (in the year of its composition) (Schmelz 2002: 304–5; Babadzhanian 1965). The six musical pictures of the title were made palatable by the national (Armenian) background of its author, which allowed colleagues and critics alike to explain away their unusual colorations. Babadjanian's 'Intermezzo' consists of repeated statements of the prime form of the initial row form at its initial transposition level. Only at inflection points (the middle, the end) is a retrograde of that initial row heard (see bb. 11–13 and the last five bars). Sylvestrov's aphoristic, Webern-like 'Serenade' and Denisov's *Variations* are also dodecaphonic (in the Soviet sense) (Schmelz 2002: 145–6; Schmelz 2009: 135–7 and 140–5; Cairns 2013). In his *Variations on a Chord*, Schnittke crafts a kind of loose dodecaphony; influenced by Webern's own Piano Variations op. 27, he borrowed its second movement's hypostatisation of pitch to explore the polystylistic possibilities of a single twelve-tone collection. It was a *sui generis* blurring of twelve-tonish and dodecaphonic approaches that Schnittke later came to dislike (Shul'gin 2004: 85).

Godzyatsky's *Ruptures of Flatness* (*Razryvy ploskostei* (1963)) exposes with special clarity the social, historical, and aesthetic cross-currents rocking many of the young Soviet composers in their early serial compositions. He called his short piano work a 'sufficiently sharp, athematic composition, but rhythmically impulsive, with elements of a sense of genre [*zhanrovost'*] and even jazz', also influenced by his study at the time of Chopin's Scherzo no. 1. He said it was 'based . . . to a large degree on a programme. In the

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rhythmic tensions, and the dissonant, fragmentary constructions there is a picture of the world and the life of microparticles' (Lunina 2013: 396, 410 and 413–14). Ukrainian pianist Evgeny Gromov goes further, saying the composition rendered a detailed narrative of nuclear reaction, explosion, and decay inspired by Godzyatsky's reading of Robert Jungk's *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (1956), as well as by his study of Stockhausen's Klavierstücke I–VIII (1952–4) and Stravinsky's late scores (Gromov 2018). Twelve-tonish, *Ruptures of Flatness* is driven by recurrent, related gestures and chords, but also by extreme registral displacement, generating a sort of pointillism. There is no unifying twelve-tone row (or rows) but a thoroughgoing attempt regularly to exhaust the complete chromatic (seen clearly in the gapped entrances of its first twelve bars) (Schmelz 2002: 143–4). Karamanov's *Prologue, Idea, and Epilogue* (1962 or 1963) amplifies this tendency: exhibiting twelve-toneness at its most twelve-tonish, it follows the law's complicated yet amorphous spirit rather than its letter (Schmelz 2002: 140–3). It was also the only composition in the Lück volumes to include specific instructions for realising the various clusters (including tremolo clusters) and indefinite rhythms in its second movement.

As Volkonsky said about his first engagement with serialism: 'from the very beginning of my study of dodecaphony, I broke its strict laws and treated them very freely, and then I devised my own system of permutations' (Dubinets 2010: 123; Schmelz 2009: 88). This flexible, intuitive attitude, shared by almost all Soviet composers using serial techniques, of any generation, explains how someone such as Shostakovich could incorporate twelve-tonish materials into his music, starting with his *Seven Verses of Alexander Blok* op. 127, and Violin Concerto no. 2 op. 129 (both 1967), and ending with his last composition, his Viola Sonata op. 147 (1975), without becoming a serial composer in any sense recognisable to Anglo-American theory or musicology (Schmelz 2004; Brown 2015).

Volkonsky in short order introduced further novel approaches in his *Suite of Mirrors* (*Siuita zerkal* (1960), mirroring) and *Laments of Shchaza* (*Zhaloby shchazy* (1962), rotations). Denisov elaborated on the serial techniques in his *Variations* in his seminal *Sun of the Incas* (*Solntse inkov* (1964)) and *Laments* (1969), both of which blend serialism with folkloric elements. Denisov also serialised multiple musical parameters in several 1960s compositions, among them *Italian Songs* (*Ital'ianskie pesni* (1964)) and *Five Stories after Herr Keuner* (*Piat' istorii o gospodine Koinere* (1966)) (Schmelz 2009: 166–71; Tsenova and Kholopov 1993: 84–9). Schnittke's *Variations on a Chord* post-dates most of his stricter serial compositions,

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including his *Music for Chamber Orchestra* (1964) and *Music for Piano and Chamber Orchestra* (1964), which included a blending of jazz and serialism in its final, third movement (Schmelz 2009: 233–57). Nikolai Karetnikov's *Lento-Variations* (1960), Violin Sonata (1961), String Quartet (1963), and Symphony no. 4 (1963) all demonstrate a more committed serial approach (Schmelz 2002: 127–35). By contrast, Sofia Gubaidulina only briefly used serial techniques in her *Five Etudes* for harp, double bass, and percussion (1965) and *Night in Memphis* (*Noch' v Memfise*, 1968), before turning to structured compositional approaches based on various rhythmic series (Schmelz 2009: 261–8; Tsenova 2000).

The inventiveness with which Soviet composers approached serial techniques reflected the somewhat haphazard ways they learned about it. Because they were not taught serialism as part of their formal conservatory training in the 1950s and 1960s, they were left to their own devices, relying on materials mailed across the border or brought in surreptitiously by approved official guests, or encountered on their own trips abroad, most importantly to the Warsaw Autumn festival (Schmelz 2009: chapter 1; Jakelski 2017). But there were inadvertent, official Soviet ways to learn too. *On Music Living and Dead* (*O muzyke zhivoi i mertvoi*) by musicologist Grigory Shneerson, the first edition of which was published in 1960, included a chart of the various row forms as well as capsule analyses of the rows in various compositions by Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Berg, which the young composers eagerly studied even as they ignored Shneerson's rote critiques of these composers (Shneerson 1960: 171–2, 182–5, and *passim*). Its second edition in 1964 included significantly more examples, among them images of graphic scores: Sylvano Bussotti's *Five Pieces for David Tudor* (1959) and John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957–8) (Shneerson 1964: 342–3). Around this time, many Soviet composers also began using graphic notation to either combine serial and aleatory approaches in their own scores, as in Pärt's *Diagramme* (1964) or to abandon the first for the second, as in Sylvestrov's *Projections* for harpsichord, vibraphone, and bells (1965), or the second movement of Karamanov's *Prologue, Idea, and Epilogue* (Schmelz 2009: 226–9 and 258).

Censorship and Control

Shneerson's book indicates the fluidity and flexibility of musical censorship in the Soviet Union in its last decades. The arts were heavily monitored and controlled, but there were often ways around spoken (or written) and, as

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often, unspoken (and unwritten) official prohibitions. There were many exceptions. After the fall of the Soviet Union, near the end of his life, Volkonsky was justifiably, if belatedly, recognised for his pioneering work on behalf of serial music in the Soviet Union. He had emigrated to Western Europe from the USSR in 1973, and his name faded immediately from all official publications. But in the 1960s, harassed into near silence by the Soviet musical establishment, Volkonsky was at best a rumour outside its borders, his music more talked about than heard.

Sylvestrov, by contrast, became the most prominent Soviet composer abroad, vying with Denisov, Schnittke, and Pärt. Sylvestrov, not Volkonsky, was awarded a Koussevitzky Prize in 1966 and second prize at the International Gaudeamus Composers' Competition in 1970. Yet, as it had Volkonsky's, Soviet censorship cut off Sylvestrov's career and coincided, indeed arguably helped prod along, a dramatic stylistic shift in his music. Remarkably, Sylvestrov's first appearances in the West themselves were censored, ostensibly to protect him from the type of blowback that had befallen novelist Boris Pasternak in the USSR after he was awarded (and was forced to decline) the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958. At a concert at the New School in New York City on 13 March 1964, Paul Jacobs played Sylvestrov's *Suite for Piano* (actually his *Five Pieces* (1961)) and four of the *Signs* that comprise *Triad*'s first part (also 1961) credited in the programme only to a 'Contemporary Soviet 12-tone composer (Name withheld)' (Schmelz 2017: 427–9). Because of the cultural Cold War, these compositions carried a mystique. Held up as exotic creations, born amid an atmosphere of repression, they drew attention as foreign audiences tuned in to see what all the fuss was about.

Discussions of music in the Soviet Union often exaggerate or mischaracterise the nature and extent of its censorship. Yet beyond the common, exasperating delays between composition and performance or publication, lasting years or decades, there could be severe repercussions for writing and playing serial and other new music. Because of his enthusiastic programming of adventurous Soviet scores, including Sylvestrov's music, during his tenure in Leningrad, Blazhov was fired from his conducting job there in 1968. Only a few months later his wife, Galina Mokreeva, a young musicologist and an outspoken proponent of new music herself, committed suicide (Schmelz 2017: 419–20; Schmelz 2015: 212–13). Sylvestrov himself was ousted from the Ukrainian Union of Composers in 1970; he was reinstated only in early 1973. It was at just this time that his final pivot away from serialism began (Schmelz 2009: 276–7; Schmelz 2020: 104–6 and *passim*).

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After Serialism, Hearing Serialism

Many of Sylvestrov's compatriots also retreated from serialism: Schnittke's serial compositions led him to polystylism, and Pärt's led him to tintinnabuli (cf. Schmelz 2020; Siitan 2021; May 2021; May 2016, esp. chapter 2; Karnes 2021). Schnittke consistently vilified serialism as an ideology even as he occasionally employed it as a technique, although it never constituted a dominant aspect of his approach after the late 1960s (see Segall 2020, esp. 245–6; and Polin 1984: 10–11). Others continued unapologetically writing serial music. Following his lead, Denisov's students and younger associates treated serialism as a 'lingua franca' (Quillen 2010: 138). As musicologist William Quillen writes, 'Denisov's celebration of complexity helped motivate many of his followers to fill their serial compositions with increasingly esoteric, hidden structures' (Quillen 2010: 138). Many employed what Quillen terms 'Serialism-Plus', or various serial hybrids, including 'serialism-plus-aleatory, serialism-plus-*sonorika,* serialism-plus-spectralism, and serialism-plus-minimalism' (Quillen 2010: 146). Examples include Viktor Yekimovsky's *Doppelkammervariationen* (1989); Faradzh Karayev's *Klänge einer traurigen Nacht* (1989); as well as Alexander Vustin's important *Zaitsev's Letter* (*Pis'mo Zaitseva* (1990)) (Quillen 2010: 130–321).

Old aesthetic categories die hard. Five years after the end of the USSR, Kurbatskaya still tried to balance the seminal socialist realist demands of form and content, technique and ideology, closing her groundbreaking 1996 discussion by asking how one was meant to listen to serialism. Her answer, in part, relied on asserting that 'serial-dodecaphonic music certainly reflects the spirit of the times in its contents'. But more than that, 'twelve-toneness represents a new, higher stage of the development of musical consciousness' (Kurbatskaia 1996: 317). Few would seriously argue this historicist point today; it was but a belated voicing of the assertion many wanted to make more vociferously in the 1960s, when they had felt it so strongly. Near the end of his life, Denisov objected to those who betrayed a 'definite snobbery' and a 'negative attitude' about serial techniques. His justification was familiar: 'serial techniques arose naturally and they arose everywhere' (Denisov and Shul'gin 2004: 139). But as Denisov well knew, serialism did not arise naturally in the Soviet Union. It took dogged effort and energetic experimentation by many composers, together with a paradoxical social engagement by composers, performers, listeners, and audiences predicated on a lack of Soviet-approved social engagement. Or, as Kurbatskaya suggests, composing, performing, and hearing serialism in the USSR required embracing new, challenging contents in new, challenging forms during new, challenging times.

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