16 'Symphonies of the free spirit': the Austro-German symphony in early Soviet Russia

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Context and infrastructure

At the time of the October revolution in 1917, Russian musical life was rich and international in outlook.[1] The capital until March 1918, St Petersburg (after 1917 Petrograd, then Leningrad), was well established as a European musical centre, with a flourishing modern music scene. In Switzerland, Stravinsky was still at work on *Les Noces*; in Russia, Prokofiev was just beginning his professional career and the internationally acclaimed star of the Imperial Opera Fyodor Chaliapin was at the height of his international fame when the Bolshevik takeover turned their country upside down. The financial and administrative consequences of the revolution were quickly felt, as previous sources of financial support for musical institutions collapsed, affecting every institution from the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theatres to the Conservatoires as well as the private finances of Russia's most distinguished musicians and composers. Previously funded by a mixture of Imperial and private sponsorship, in 1918 all institutions became wholly dependent on the State in accordance with the Soviet policy of nationalisation. As early as February 1917, the Petersburg Imperial Orchestra was renamed the State Symphony Orchestra, directed at first by Serge Koussevitzky; under its second conductor Emil Cooper (from 1920), it became the State, then the Leningrad, Philharmonia. By the spring/summer of 1918 there were already several orchestras active in Petrograd, including the demobilised Preobrazhensky orchestra, who gave classical concerts that included two symphonic cycles devoted to Beethoven and to Wagner's music. Other symphonic concerts took place in the Theatre of Music Drama and their programmes consisted of the same mainstream repertoire: Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Wagner, Rimsky Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Skryabin. The State Philharmonia ran a series of 'People's Concerts' aimed at the new mass audience: programmes included Mozart's Requiem, Berlioz's *Funeral and Triumphal Symphony*, the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and Skryabin's *Prometheus*. In these early years before emigration decimated the ranks of musical talent in Russia, Nikolai Tcherepnin, Albert Coates, Aleksandr Ziloti, Gregor Fitelberg and Serge Koussevitzky were the main conductors at these

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concerts.[2] In Moscow, theatre orchestras gave the majority of symphonic concerts, headed by the orchestra of the Bolshoi; the Moscow Philharmonia (Mosfil), founded in 1921, was for a time known as Rosfil (the Russian Orchestra of the Soviet Philharmonia), and after 1928 as Sofil (Soviet Orchestra of the Philharmonia). In addition to these pre-revolutionary survivors, one especially important new ensemble was formed: Persimfans, the famous conductorless orchestra, which was founded by Lev Tseitlin in 1922 and survived until 1932.

The body charged with the administration of cultural affairs was Narkompros, the Commissariat for Enlightenment, headed by the liberally inclined Anatoly Lunacharsky (until 1929). But in the traditional informal Russian fashion, various semi-formal 'circles of friends' still met during the 1920s to discuss and share their musical interests, and the most productive of these, at least initially, was the Association for Contemporary Music (ASM) based in Moscow (established in 1923), and its short-lived Leningrad counterpart, the LASM (established in 1926). Their concerns were chiefly the performance of new Western and Soviet music, and their membership was influential enough to sponsor major musical events, symphonic and chamber concerts, and to liaise with the International Society for Contemporary Music in sending Soviet composers to ISCM festivals in Europe. The foremost Soviet musicologist, Boris Asafiev (pseudonym Igor Glebov), coordinated similar events in Leningrad. The other major group was dedicated to furthering the cause of music written by and for the proletariat: the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM). Initially founded in 1923 with a handful of members, RAPM gradually grew in strength and influence to the point where, by 1930, they were easily the dominant force in Soviet musical life. This chapter in Soviet musical history has been well documented, and it is necessary only to note that, with the Central Committee's Resolution of 1932 'On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations', all factionalism in cultural life came to an abrupt halt, to be replaced by creative unions that were directly answerable to the powerful, State-monitored Committee of Arts Affairs.[3]

Despite cultural losses caused by the wave of emigration after 1917, the period 1920 to (approximately) 1937 was an extremely fertile period of cultural exchange between Russia and Western Europe. Visiting foreign conductors included Otto Klemperer and Fritz Stiedry (both until 1937), Oscar Fried (who made his permanent home in Moscow), Bruno Walter, Erich Kleiber, Hermann Abendrot and Heinz Unger; George Szell and Alexander Zemlinsky also visited the Soviet Union. These were musicians deeply steeped in Austro-German tradition and who were largely responsible for the popularity of Mahler in Leningrad in the 1920s and 30s.[4]

Under their direction, Soviet audiences heard an impressive range of Western music, both old and new. A glance at concert programmes from the late 1920s gives a fair idea of typical concert repertoire during these years. In February 1929 Klemperer and the Sofil performed Weill's Suite from *The Threepenny Opera*, Janacek's Sinfonietta, Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète* and *Petrushka*, Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. An ASM-sponsored concert of May 1928 included Brahms's Fourth Symphony, Respighi's *Pines of Rome* and Strauss's *Don Juan*; their second concert, conducted by V. Savich, featured Liszt's *Les Préludes*, Respighi's *Fountains of Rome* and the Russian premiere of Prokofiev's Suite from *The Steel Step*. Repertoire for workers' concerts was necessarily simpler, consisting of a mixture of songs, chamber works, overtures and symphonies by mostly nineteenth-century Western and Russian composers (Beethoven, Borodin, Liszt, Wagner and Musorgsky featured prominently).

Although the principal aims of the ASM were not specifically didactic, its members were nevertheless involved in the wider project to 'bring music to the masses'. Asafiev was a prolific music writer for the Narkompros popular paper *Zhizn' iskusstva* (*Life of Art*), addressing the issue of how best to introduce the new audiences to what he and others regarded as their shared musical heritage and writing programme notes and brochures for distribution at concerts. It is evident that those in positions of power, like Asafiev, regarded themselves chiefly as facilitators and educators. Although historians tend to divide the 'modern' and 'proletarian' wings very sharply, both sides were driven by educational zeal and shared more common ground than might be assumed. They both believed that the proletariat required guidance on what to listen to; although RAPM was openly opposed to light music in a way that other groups were not, it is clear that for Asafiev, Lunacharsky and other powerful figures in musical life, the emphasis was on education by way of exposure to art music, whether that was to be Mozart, Glinka, Beethoven or even Stravinsky. In short, the whole climate of Soviet musical life in the 1920s and early 30s was directed by a deep-seated patriarchalism in which Western and Russian 'classics' played a central, and fairly uncontroversial, role.[5] The custodians of high art, at least from the non-proletarian side, were not substantially different in background, taste and education than their pre-revolutionary predecessors had been, and only they were able to exert influence over repertoire through inviting foreign conductors and performers, hosting concerts and liaising with the West. Even when RAPM assumed greater power in 1929, their years of triumph were very short-lived, and even then they were not able to exercise significant influence over the mainstream concert life of the Leningrad and Moscow philharmonias. In any case, when it came to orchestral repertoire, their main difference of opinion

was not concerning the importance of retaining the Western classical and Romantic legacy (if selectively), but rather on the role of Western modernism in Soviet musical life. In comparison with the bitter disputes over Schoenberg, Hindemith and Stravinsky, the presence of Austro-German classical and Romantic repertoire in Soviet musical life was relatively uncontroversial. Though RAPM are sometimes assumed to have opposed all Western music except for Beethoven, this is a simplification of their position (which was in any case hardly rigidly uniform). An article by Lev Lebedinsky in *Proletarskiy muzïkant* (*Proletarian musician*) in 1929 suggests works by the following composers as suitable for workers' audiences: Schubert, Liszt, Schumann, Wagner, Mozart, Rossini, Bizet, Grieg, Chopin, Haydn, Bach and Verdi.[6] What is more, the scheduling of those works remained stable during the whole period from the revolution to Russia's entry into the Second World War. Although, as will be seen, writers focussed on socio-historical consideration of Western composers, relating them to progressive social trends wherever possible, it is doubtful whether this would have had a significant bearing on actual concert repertoire. The overall picture that emerges when critical and scholarly articles are set alongside concert programmes is one of synergy rather than dictat: the only 'Party line' one could speak of during the 1920s and early-to-mid 1930s is that of mass education. Apart from the huge popularity of more overtly 'revolutionary' figures such as Beethoven, most Western composers slotted in somewhere between passively reflecting social forces and actively resisting capitalism – both equally valid from the point of view of Marxist–Leninist aesthetics.

'The dying culture of the feudal classes': Bach, Mozart and Haydn

Perhaps unexpectedly,[7] one of the staples of Soviet repertoire in the earliest years was Mozart's Requiem.[8] The first People's Concert, in a series promoted by Narkompros targeting specifically proletarian audiences, took place on May Day 1918 in the Winter Palace – a performance of the Requiem as a memorial to the victims of the revolution.[9] As with a number of religious works, including Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and even Bach's B Minor Mass, the Requiem's Christian content was considered of less significance than its status as part of the Western classical canon. Musicologists advanced historical arguments as to why such repertoire was appropriate in the new Soviet state. In *Muzïkalnaya nov* (*Musical Virgin Soil*), the journal that from 1924 was the 'Organ of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians', the proletarian writer Sergey Chemodanov placed Bach, Haydn and Mozart firmly in the context of those artists who belonged to the 'Third Estate' – the

title given to those in pre-revolutionary France who were not members of the clergy or the aristocracy. In other words, they were members of the rising eighteenth-century bourgeois class, who overturned medieval feudalism and laid the foundations for republicanism and democracy. Since, Chemodanov argued, 'the whole atmosphere of the pre-revolutionary epoch was saturated with the psychological struggle of two cultures, the obsolete feudal and the rising Third Estate', Bach's music expressed this turning-point in history, while the 'salon elegance' of Haydn and Mozart's music anticipates the victory of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie 'over the dying culture of the feudal classes'.[10] The 'deep, lucid lyricism' of Bach's Protestant music, 'leading the change from the dark chasms of Catholic gloom' is accompanied by a shift from polyphony to homophony that Chemodanov believes articulates the cult of individualism that saw its full flowering in the sonata forms of Haydn and Mozart: 'Musical monism, which reached its end in Bach's fugues, gave way in the eighteenth century to dualism, which did not only not oppose the individualistic ideology of the third estate, but on the contrary, drew closer to a connection with the interrelation of classes of that time.'[11] In this context, Bach's sacred works represent not an obsolete form of Christian worship but the start of the break from feudal (Catholic) Europe, looking ahead to the Enlightenment and so to Revolution. What was true for Bach was even more so for his successors, and the music of the three titans of the classical style – Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven – is thus interpreted as practically a call to arms: 'It is this very heroism . . . which sustains 18th-century Enlightenment philosophy that serves as the ideology of the third estate, already close to the storm of the French revolution.'[12]

Such overtly political arguments were undoubtedly convenient for the images of composers so accredited with passive revolutionary sympathies. But they did not completely dominate music criticism. Asafiev's articles on Mozart in the popular paper *Zhizn iskusstva* of the following year focus on the composer as a personality and an artist rather than as a vehicle for historical forces. They are also a subtle defence of art for art's sake in the new Soviet context: 'If we feel that art – no abstract concept but a living force produced by great people – is a concrete revelation of this force, then it is impossible to invent a more vital and great, beautiful revelation or expression of this force than the figure of Mozart.'[13] The composer's personal qualities are also asserted: '[Mozart] was not a slave to his own suffering . . . he was not a proud person and his music did not display him as a person, did not postulate or declare his own "I", but [he] created music just to be art, as knowledge of the world through the expression of his own artistic sense in sound.'[14] It would be hard to find a more complete Soviet avowal of the doctrine of art for art's sake than this: once the personality of the composer is placed beyond reproach, their music requires no further

justification. From two very different perspectives, then, Soviet readers are urged to accept Bach, Mozart and Haydn as representative of their own time; certainly not as models to be emulated by Soviet composers, but as founders of the classical tradition that was offered to the new Soviet listeners as their own birthright.

Notable by its absence in the journals of the 1920s was any serious discussion of the fact that Mozart and Haydn were dependent on rich aristocratic patrons, and played a full part in court musical life. Boris Shteynpress's 1935 article 'On Mozart's Instrumental Music' confronts this issue at the very same time as repeating essentially the same argument that the classical style was inherently democratic:

> Mozart was obliged to write for the tastes of the ruling class . . . [he] wrote in the epoch of the Enlightenment . . . which arose from the struggle for freedom of bourgeois democrats against the feudal regime and which enveloped the whole area of public life and culture. The distinctive features of this world-view . . . are a deep and steadfast optimism based on a solid faith in the victory of the ennobling force of the human intellect, in progress, in a better future for humanity . . . In place of constrained and abstract religious content . . . and the superficial hedonism of the salon and courtly art, the classical style advanced a new ideo-emotional musical content . . . Haydn gave birth to major images of democracy . . . to mass-ness, the attraction of everyday life, to the spiritual world of "simple people", to a natural expression of human feeling.[15]

Both Mozart and Haydn are seen as compromised figures, unable, for social and financial reasons, to transcend their dependence on aristocratic patronage; and so ultimately, Shteynpress argues, 'the author of the Jupiter Symphony must undoubtedly give way to that of the Eroica and Appassionata'.[16] But it is important to note that there is nothing fundamentally new in Shteynpress's arguments: the Soviet apologia for Western classicism remains the same in the 1930s as it was in the 1920s. Only Asafiev's insistence on the validity of beauty for its own sake finds no echo in the 1930s, which, given the pressurised nature of musical discussions about definable expressive content during that decade, is hardly surprising.

'Every revolution is a grandiose symphony': The Beethoven cult

Beethoven enjoyed a status in the Soviet Union that can only be compared to that of Shakespeare and Pushkin.[17] Since there was enough anecdotal and documentary evidence to paint him as a true revolutionary, he was

feted by all sides of the cultural spectrum. Famous incidents such as Beethoven's refusal to stand aside for the Imperial family at Teplitz, his angry rejection of Napoleon after he became Emperor, his flight from Prince Lichnowsky's castle and the letter which followed it ('Prince! What you are, you are by birthright. Of princes there have been and will be thousands. Of Beethovens there is only one')[18] all fed the Soviet image of Beethoven as an artist whose music was directly inspired by the French Revolution and the rhetoric of personal freedom and fraternal equality that surrounded it. Beethoven was not just a fellow-traveller to the Soviets – someone whose ideals were passively sympathetic to the revolution – he was himself claimed as a revolutionary, and as such was an obvious role-model for Soviet composers. For those seeking to render Western classical music appealing and relevant to the proletariat, this romanticised version of Beethoven was invaluable. From Lunacharsky's introductory speeches at workers' concerts to Asafiev's programme notes, to articles in the popular music and arts press, the message was clear: Beethoven was a revolutionary like us, and we are the rightful heirs of his revolutionary message.

Like Lenin and other colleagues in the early Bolshevik administration, Lunacharsky's musical tastes were conservative and his broad aim was social engineering – the cultural education of the proletariat on a vast scale – rather than producing Bolshevik propaganda.[19] In his article 'Great Sisters' of 1926, he reels off a series of assertions typical of this period: 'Not for nothing did Beethoven's music come out of the French revolution; it was saturated with it ... Such a demigod of the musical world as Beethoven ... is able to plunge into the deepest musical poetry which, being expressed in the language of human consciousness, raises mountainous problems, struggles, and victories.'[20] In the centenary year 1927, several music journals devoted whole issues to Beethoven.[21] The Narkompros journal *Muzïka i revoliutsiya* had a special issue in March, headed by Lunacharsky's article 'How Beethoven Lives for Us'; Evgeny Braudo's article 'Beethoven-Citizen' claims that in the *Eroica* 'the musician and social activist is revealed in all his depth and breadth'; 'revolutionary rhythms run through [the *Eroica*] like a red thread; its rhythm is of the electrified crowd rushing to storm the Bastille'.[22]

A more dispassionate note was struck in Boleslav Pshibïshevskiy's article in the RAPM journal *Proletarskiy muzïkant* in 1931. Pshibïshevskiy was the director of the Moscow Conservatoire from 1929, under whom its name temporarily changed to the Feliks Kon Higher Music School. The article was openly mocked and censured in the 1930s;[23] but what is most striking about it now is rather how uncontroversial Pshibïshevskiy's observations actually were. Noting that Beethoven, typically for his time, was 'a revolutionary in

thought but not in deed', he describes the composer's dependence on aristocratic patrons as tragic-comic: 'The point here is not the personal inconsistency of Beethoven, but rather the tragedy, though perhaps it would be better to speak of a tragic-comedy, of the famous petit-bourgeoisie which allowed itself and its own revolutionary philosopher, Hegel, to be at the same time the philosopher of the Prussian king, or Beethoven to dedicate the most revolutionary of all his works, the Ninth Symphony, to that same king, the reactionary Friedrich Wilhelm III.'[24] Pshibïshevskiy's tone may be less reverent than that of other writers, but he does go on to assert that Soviet music needs to synthesise Beethoven's 'dialectic' and Musorgsky's realism to forge a new proletarian music – hardly an original claim, either in the 1920s or the 1930s.

As with Mozart and Haydn, the same arguments in support of Beethoven's revolutionary credentials were voiced in the 1930s as they had been in the 1920s. After 1932, there might have been a backlash against the excessive canonisation of Beethoven in the preceding decade, especially as appropriated by the more militant members of the proletarian wing. But there was no such reaction; in the absence of any alternative hero, Beethoven was still the most persuasive revolutionary composer of the past. Pavel Veis's attack on Pshibïshevsky in 1933 accuses the former Conservatoire director of 'vulgarization and distortion', but nevertheless repeats his central argument: that Beethoven's music 'undoubtedly belongs to that bourgeois legacy which has enormous significance for the proletariat'.[25]

Efforts to bring Beethoven's music to the masses continued well into the 1930s, preserving an important legacy of proletarian activity from the 1920s. 'Beethoven brigades' were charged with the task of educating (and entertaining) the Red Army. In 1935, one report of such an evening at the Theatre Bureau of the Central House of the Red Army was published in *Sovetskaya muzïka*. One concert included movements from the Moonlight and Pathètique Sonatas, the first movement of the Kreutzer Sonata, fragments from *Egmont* and the Scottish songs, interspersed with readings from Beethoven's letters and talks about his life. Even between acts the audience was not permitted to relax: the brigade put on readings from Lenin, Goethe, Romain Rolland and Nikolay Bukharin in the foyer, and held question-and-answer sessions with the audience. One soldier went straight to the heart of Beethoven's rather paradoxical position as a revolutionary, asking why he dedicated works to counts and princes. The reply is predictable: 'He had no choice. It was a matter of struggle for existence, for pay. But he never humbled himself before them.'[26]

As Beethoven's close contemporary, Schubert was not afforded anything like the same degree of adulation, but was nevertheless extremely

popular in the 1920s. His centenary year followed Beethoven's in 1928, though it was marked in a far more muted manner. *Muzïka i revoliutsiya*, however, published a special Schubert issue in October that neatly sets out Schubert's rather more ambiguous credentials as a fellow-traveller, much in the same way as Chemodanov had contrived to do with Bach, Haydn and Mozart. Mikhail Pekelis pointed out that Schubert, unlike his direct predecessors, had no links with the aristocracy and wrote his music for amateurs and friends, drawing attention to his use of folk dances and melodies and his new brand of 'lyrical symphonism'.[27] Concert programmes for workers' clubs throughout the 1920s reveal that Schubert songs were regular favourites, whether performed as originally intended, or in special arrangements for folk instruments; a review of such an event in 1928 reports that the overture from *Rosamunde* was played on folk instruments and the F minor *Moment Musical* on balalaika and in a second transcription for mandolin and guitar.[28]

Fellow travellers: Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Brahms

Of these five composers, Liszt was probably the most popular figure in Russian musical life before the revolution. He had visited Russia in 1842 and 1843 and had close connections both with Vladimir Stasov, Mily Balakirev and the Russian National School and also with Anton Rubinstein, whom he knew and admired as a pianist, composer and conductor. Virtuosic Romantic piano repertoire was a staple of Conservatoire pedagogy and concert life in both Moscow and Petersburg, and this tradition – in which Chopin, Liszt and Schumann featured prominently – continued seamlessly into the Soviet period. During the 1920s, Schumann's orchestral music was not performed with anything like the regularity of Liszt's or Berlioz's but he had his supporters nonetheless. In 1926, Mikhail Ivanov-Boretsky asserted that 'Every bar of Schumann's music is far from formalism … and is saturated with a genuine, deep romanticism understood as the reflection in music of the composer's spiritual life.'[29] As one of the group of artists who marked the transition from classical Enlightenment heroism to a self-absorbed style of individualism and pessimism, Schumann played a role in what Soviet critics perceived as the gradual decline of the Austro-German symphonic tradition and was thus vulnerable to criticism. Ivanov-Boretsky came to his aid again in 1930 with an article on his revolutionary choruses, reproducing the unpublished 1848 song 'To arms!' in his own handwritten manuscript and arguing that only those little acquainted with Schumann's biography would describe him merely as a dreamer who was sunk in his own

creative work.[30] A later evaluation of Schumann in 1933 was rather less supportive: Mikhail Cheremukhin grouped Schubert and Schumann together as great realist song composers, citing *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Dichterliebe* as exemplars, but nonetheless remaining slightly critical of Schumann:

> [Dichterliebe] is already akin to a narcotic hashish: Schumann thinks in fairytale images, is carried away by fairy legends, images from the past. And here we have an interesting contradiction: the more Schumann departs from the realm of the fantastic, the more clearly he strives to 'get away from' relating to genuine reality, the more strongly he summons that reality, not as its master, but as its servant.[31]

Though sitting just outside the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that Berlioz – whose revolutionary sympathies were far better documented – fared much better, which perhaps reveals the importance of having an ideologically respectable biography. His *Funeral and Triumphal Symphony* commemorating those who died in the 1830 revolution is obscure in the West today, but was frequently performed in the Soviet 1920s, as was his *Symphonie fantastique*. The first recorded Soviet performance of the *Funeral and Triumphal Symphony* took place on 8 November 1918, at the second of Lunacharsky's 'People's Concerts' in Smolny, Petrograd. Liszt's orchestral works were also regular fixtures in the concert programmes of the 1920s, and, as with Beethoven, there was enough revolutionary lore around him to preserve ideological credibility and his reputation remained stable during the whole Soviet period. In the 1930s he had a powerful supporter in Georgy Khubov, an intelligent and influential music critic. The fact that Liszt's revolutionary interests waned after 1848 was an inescapable part of his biography, which Khubov did not try to ignore; nor did he overlook Liszt's aristocratic connections. In this regard, Khubov's apologia for Liszt recalls earlier defences of Beethoven: '[Liszt] understood early on the pain of moral humiliation of the "artist in the role of a lackey"'; he felt the 'deep dissatisfaction of [his] generation of artists with bourgeois society, [was] conscious of [his] own exceptional creative talent and [his] inability to find a means of concrete application . . . One must understand all this in order to "excuse" his blunders, errors, unhealthy tendencies . . . in order to approach the essence of the internal contradictions of Liszt's creative development.'[32]

Very little mention is made of Mendelssohn in the journals of the 1920s and 30s, but performance data from the Leningrad Philharmonia show that, in Leningrad at least, the most frequently performed work was the Violin Concerto (eighty-four times between 1921 and 1971), with the Third and Fourth symphonies receiving twenty-one and twenty-eight performances respectively.[33] Only the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Violin Concerto were in Persimfans' repertoire, which

suggests that Mendelssohn's music was never strikingly popular, but maintained a steady, uncontroversial presence in Soviet musical life.[34] Where Brahms was concerned, Soviet writers seemed inclined equally to polite uninterest – a common accusation was that of 'academicism' – or genuine enthusiasm. The most notable attempt to situate Brahms in a favourable political context can be found in Ivan Sollertinsky's Leningrad Philharmonic brochures written between 1936 and 1941. As a piece of ideological posturing, Sollertinsky's position is as extreme in its mode of expression as anything penned by a member of RAPM, and it is a reflection of the anti-Western xenophobia of the period that his views were so widely circulated and appreciated:

> Brahms . . . understood that the Liszt–Wagner [mode of] erotic languor and ecstacy, Schopenhaurian, Buddhist or neo-Catholic pessimism, Tristanesque harmony, mystical illumination, dreams of the superman, led straight to modernism and decadence, to the collapse of classical European art culture. This very bacillus of decadence, openly or secretly present in this 'music of the future' represented the greatest danger to Brahms . . . The issue was no less than the future fate of European musical culture: whether it would follow the classical–romantic tradition connected with the great musical past, or to irrepressibly slide along a decadent slope . . . To resist the break-up of European musical culture, to orientate oneself towards the great classical epoch of the past, to embrace strict classical forms, to struggle against the porous, vague, rotten neo-Romantic epigones – such was Brahms's great historical dilemma.[35]

It is unclear whether this kind of writing was actually required in order to facilitate the continuing performance of Brahms's music, or whether Sollertinsky sincerely believed in his own rhetoric, but Brahms's symphonies do seem to have been more frequently played in the 1930s than they had been in the 1920s. There seems to have been no obvious reason for the comparative neglect of Brahms and Mendelssohn in critical literature as well as concert life in the 1920s, other than that neither composer had anything remotely 'revolutionary' in his biography, and so did not make especially attractive topics for Soviet critics eager to demonstrate their ideological and scholarly credentials. Sollertinsky's brochures represent a very different approach from that found in the 1920s: their more aggressively political tone reflects the hardening in cultural attitudes that took place from the mid 1930s on.

One of the most substantial articles in the post-RAPM years to address the wider issue of romanticism in music was that by Lev Kaltat and David Rabinovich, 'Fighting for a Heritage', in the third issue of *Sovetskaya muzïka* in 1933. These former RAPM supporters now offered measured criticism of their former policies, describing RAPM's fixation with

Beethoven and their notions of 'acceptable' repertoire as 'narrow and confined'.[36] More importantly, they go on to describe the German Romantics (Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Weber) as democratic in their portrayal of the 'petit-bourgeois intellectual . . . the burgher, the craftsman, the peasant' as the heroes of their music. Liszt and Wagner, on the other hand, exemplify the collapse of revolutionary idealism after 1848, where artists could choose one of two paths: that of the proletariat or that of the 'reactionary bourgeois-aristocratic bloc'. The 'third way' represented by Brahms was dogged by 'dead academic forms' and 'expressive epigonism'.[37] No reader of *Muzïka i revoliutsiya* in the 1920s would have found these arguments startling, and their portrayal of the Romantics as democratic also echoes Sollertinsky's arguments on behalf of Mahler and Bruckner, which were published as early as 1929.[38] It is a revealing reminder of how much common ground some former RAPM members and the wider musical community shared after 1932 that by 1938, the same writer, Rabinovich, was bemoaning the lack of Western classical repertoire in the Mosfil 1937–8 season. There were almost no performances of Bach's music, no Handel or Haydn at all, only 'pitiful snatches' of Mozart, one solitary Schubert work (unnamed), no Mendelssohn or Schumann, and only Brahms's Third Symphony and piano concertos were heard.[39] Perhaps in response to this and other criticism they had received, Mosfil announced their 1939–40 season in August 1939, in which Bach's B Minor Mass, Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, Mozart's Requiem, Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite, Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and Haydn's *The Seasons* were all planned alongside Soviet works. As the 1930s drew to a close, then, these and other canonical works of Western classicism and romanticism still occupied their central role in Soviet musical life.

'The last of the Mohicans': Bruckner, Mahler and Strauss

Of these three late Romantics,[40] Bruckner was by far the least well represented in Soviet programmes. An early performance of his Seventh Symphony (by Fritz Stiedry) in 1926 was apparently coolly received, and in Sollertinsky's list of Mahler and Bruckner performances in the Soviet Union between 1922 and 1942, Bruckner's symphonies were programmed just twenty-three times, as compared with Mahler's forty-six (repeat performances not counted).[41] But Bruckner, like Mahler, had keen supporters. There was a Bruckner and Mahler society that met regularly in Leningrad during the 1920s to perform their symphonies in four-hand arrangements, in which Sollertinsky played an active part.[42] Soviet concert reviews of the 1920s and 30s are intermittently sprinkled with complaints

about the dearth of Bruckner performances, and as late as 1935 Aleksandr Ostretsov, reviewing Fried's performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, bemoaned the fact that in Moscow Bruckner's symphonies were still very little known. The substance of his review recalls the historical posturing typical of the 1920s:

> If Mahler's symphonies show us the development of the petit-bourgeois art of Austria . . . then Bruckner's art introduces us to the final stage of a romantic idyll – the period of 'peaceful' autumn flowering, already close to extinction. Listening to this music, we feel that the composer was inspired by naïve illusions of burgheresque ideology, with its rapturous attitude to nature and belief in the moral foundation of the patriarchal life of 'good old Vienna', which was itself already crushed by Imperialism.[43]

Sollertinsky was one of the most powerful advocates of Bruckner's music in the 1930s, as he was of Mahler's. But to advocate a favourite composer in this decade required substantial ideological justification: where symphonic repertoire was concerned, every composer needed to be appropriately framed in Soviet rhetoric. In his 1940 brochure for the Leningrad Philharmonia's performance of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, Sollertinsky argued, much as he had done for Mahler,[44] that Bruckner's music encapsulates the crisis of capitalist social alienation and search for man's true place in the world:

> The fundamental theme of Bruckner's symphonies may be understood as the great internal loneliness of the individual (the Romantic disharmony between the artist and the cruel laws of capitalist reality . . .); the overcoming of loneliness in a pantheistic blending of man with nature, with the earth and the cosmos . . . of the emotional colour of rural *Landschaft* (though never in the spirit of Strauss's 'Alpine' Symphony); of naïve pastoral song.[45]

With the statement 'Bruckner is the Schubert of the second half of the 19th Century', Sollertinsky sums up his picture of the composer as an artist deeply rooted in folk culture, transplanted to the cruel environment of the capitalist city. However, the fact that Bruckner spent his entire career in the nineteenth century made him a slightly different – even safer – proposition than Mahler, whose last six symphonies and *Das Lied von der Erde* were written in the twentieth century. During the 1920s, some proletarian critics hostile to Western modernism seemed unsure where Mahler belonged – with Schoenberg and Expressionism, or with the late Romantics. In 1922, Evgeny Braudo's article 'On Expressionism in Music' claims that, though Mahler was antipathetic to the Russian listener, he was popular with the German public. This in itself is recognisable in the rhetoric of the time as an insult, which Braudo immediately expands upon: 'It is impossible to ignore the sign of the times in the fact that Mahler holds such sway over the soul of the

contemporary West.'[46] In other words, Mahler's popularity was a symptom of the decline of Western culture into decadence; by implied contrast, it was only in the Soviet Union that the more spiritually robust Beethovenian symphonic tradition could be renewed.

The irony is, of course, that Mahler's music swiftly became far more popular in Soviet Russia that it did in some parts of Western Europe, Britain leading the way in its mistrust of what seemed like overblown, over-complex symphonies. Those features of Mahler's music that had always been the most controversial – his juxtapositions of the serious and the banal – registered with Braudo as equally objectionable, complaining of its

> unexpected transitions from . . . gloomy pathos to artificial lightness and gaiety, mannered minor-key fanfares leading to grandiose funeral marches alongside glowing 'rustic' pages in the spirit of Haydn, fairytale craft alongside the most philistine gutter taste. In a word, [it is] a total rejection of that which until now was considered the chief object of a symphonic composition: self-possession, balance and refinement of artistic material . . . We . . . felt . . . a rude sting from this music.[47]

What is striking today about this review is how acute Braudo's experience of Mahler actually was, and how freshly his music sounded to Russian ears. In Leningrad, where Mahler's symphonies were frequently played, critics were more responsive; but in Moscow old prejudices evidently took some time to die (or simply to emigrate). The Moscow ASM critics Viktor Belyayev and Leonid Sabaneyev were both Mahler sceptics; in 1924 Belyayev echoed Braudo's suspicion of Mahler's German popularity, sarcastically dubbing him, together with Strauss, 'the apparent idols of German lands'. It seems curious at first glance that Mahler's music should be more favourably received in the more conservative climate of the 1930s than it was in the 1920s. But as a late Romantic rather than a modernist, Mahler was not a favourite of the Moscow ASM camp; and it is hardly surprising that the proletarian critics did not clamour for performances of symphonies lasting over an hour, and which were completely unplayable by untrained musicians. It was Sollertinsky – a versatile and popular lecturer and scholar in Leningrad and from 1937 to 1944 artistic director of the Leningrad Philharmonic – who did most to popularise Mahler's music in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Through his programme notes for Philharmonia concerts, public lectures and a monograph devoted to the composer, Sollertinsky propagandised on behalf of Mahler's music, even arguing (albeit rather obliquely) that his symphonies made ideal models for Soviet composers because of their 'democratic' musical language and ambitious expressive scope.

Cheremukhin, the critic who wrote disparagingly of the 'narcotic' effects of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, was equally at sea when it came to Mahler. In the same article, he links Mahler with Reger and Hindemith as proponents of dry contrapuntalism: 'May this "horizontal unfolding" music be the bearer of valuable realist expression? I don't think so.'[48] Clearly, Sollertinsky had not managed to convince everyone. But it is important to note how few criticisms of Mahler there actually were in the 1920s and 30s; Strauss fared far worse, and yet his music also continued to be performed. As Sollertinsky's writings on Mahler demonstrate, it was relatively easy to paint him as a fellow-traveller, broadly in sympathy with the proletariat. Such anecdotes as Mahler's joining the Vienna May Day parade in 1905 and his Dostoevsky-inspired expression of fraternity ('How can one be happy when a single being on earth still suffers?') were all grist to Sollertinsky's mill in this respect.[49]

The fact that Strauss was still alive and flourishing undoubtedly made him more suspect a figure than Mahler. Critical hostility became even more pronounced after 1933, when Strauss's role as president of the Reichsmusikammer tainted his reputation throughout Europe and America. But even as early as 1923, Sabaneyev (who would soon emigrate to the West) expressed a deeper-seated ambivalence to his music: 'It is easy to relate his creativity to the new Germany and to a militaristic, crassly grandiose striving for pomposity, parade, outer glory. Strauss's creativity is a good barometer of the ... archetypal new German.'[50] Whereas in Beethoven militaristic rhythms reflect the general revolutionary atmosphere, in Strauss they sound like a celebration of victory: 'like some Wagnerian Kaisermarsch'.[51] While not denying Strauss's brilliance, Sabaneyev cautions: 'in the midst of all these attributes ... he has many features of insincerity, pretence ... [and] window-dressing'.[52] Nevertheless, Strauss's tone-poems, in particular *Till Eulenspiegel* and *Don Juan*, were frequently performed throughout the 1920s and it was only after 1933 that criticism of the composer gradually became more pointed and his music less often played.

As the 1930s moved into the period of High Stalinism (approximately 1934–53), there was a shift away from programming Western music and towards celebrating the Russian 'classics', especially Tchaikovsky and Musorgsky. The influx of foreign musicians gradually dried up after 1937, and the signing of the Nazi–Soviet pact in 1939 further damaged relations with the West until the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Hand in hand with this growing isolationism, though, were more positive developments: after protracted struggles between the Moscow Composers' Union and the Moscow Philharmonia, the 1937–8 season featured festivals both of pre-revolutionary Western and Russian and of

new Soviet music.[53] Young, talented Russian conductors like Evgeny Mravinsky and Kirill Kondrashin took the place of their Austro-German predecessors, and the growing establishment of Shostakovich as a major symphonist after the premiere of the Fifth Symphony in 1937, together with the return of Prokofiev in 1936, meant that a strong Soviet tradition at last began to take root in the concert hall. It was, therefore, a combination of positive and negative factors that would see concert repertoire changing in the late 1930s. Once reliant on the personal support of conductors for performances, Soviet composers were empowered by the formations of their Unions in 1932 with the support in publication, radio coverage and concert programming that followed, albeit gradually. While the High-Stalinist period saw Western (and early Soviet) modernism excluded from concert schedules, canonic works of Western classicism and romanticism maintained a relatively stable presence in 1930s Soviet musical life. What began as an inspired project to bring art to the masses thus formed the basis of concert life in the first two decades of the Soviet Union, with Austro-German symphonism at its heart.

Notes

1 The title of the chapter, 'Symphonies of the Free Spirit', is from Igor Glebov, 'Russkaya simfonicheskaya muzïka za 10 let' ['A Decade of Russian Symphonic Music'], *Muzïka i revoliutsiya* [*Music and Revolution*], 11 (1927), 21. I would like to thank David Fanning for his generous loan of materials and Lidia Ader for sending me important articles from Russia. I am extremely grateful to those friends and colleagues who read the draft of this chapter and offered valuable advice and correction: Lidia Ader, Philip Bullock, Marina Frolova-Walker, Levon Hakobian and Simo Mikkonen.

2 Elena Bronfin, *Muzïkalnaya kultura Petrograda pervogo poslereoliutinnogo pyatiletiya 1917–1922* [*The Musical Culture of Petrograd in the First Five Years after the Revolution*] (Leningrad, 1984), 44–8.

3 See principally Amy Nelson, *Music for the Revolution. Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* (Philadelphia, 2004) and Neil Edmunds, *The Soviet Proletarian Music Movement* (Bern, 2000).

4 Oscar Fried had conducted the first performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony in St Petersburg as early as 1906, to a cool response. See Inna Barsova, 'Mahler in Russia', in Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson, eds., *The Mahler Companion* (New York and Oxford, 1999), 525.

5 It should be noted that the Futurists' famous rejection of past art as advanced in their 1912 manifesto 'A Slap in the Face of Public Taste' found little echo in musical circles. Apart from some early examples of musical 'futurism' in the form of machine-music (most famously in the 'Zavod' ['Factory'] movement of Mosolov's ballet *Stal* [*Steel*]), most of the music written by the early Soviet 'avant-garde' was nothing like as radical as contemporary movements in literary and visual art.

6 Lev Lebedinsky, 'Kontsertnaya rabota v rabochey auditorii' ['Concert Works for Workers' Audiences'], *Proletarsky muzïkant*, 2 (1929), 9.

7 The quotation in the heading is from Sergey Chemodanov, 'Muzïka i teoriya istoricheskogo materializma' ['Music and the Theory of Historical Materialism'], *Muzïkalnaya nov* [*Musical Virgin Soil*], 20 (1923), 16.

8 Regarding symphonic works, Persimfans's repertoire contained only symphonies nos. 40, 41 and another erroneously listed as 'D minor'. This may have been K 385, the 'Haffner' symphony, which is in D major. See S. Ponyatovskiy, *Persimfans – orkestr bez dirizhera* [*Persimfans – the Conductorless Orchestra*] (Moscow, 2003), 188. Of all Mozart's symphonies, nos. 33, 39 and 40 were performed most frequently by the Leningrad Philharmonia, with forty, forty-one and fifty-six performances respectively between 1921 and 1971; but the Requiem was performed eighty-six times in the same period. See Boris Arapov et al., *Leningradskaya gosudarstvennaya ordena trudovogo krasnogo*

znameni filarmonia: stati, vospominania, materiali (Leningrad, 1972), 344.
9 Bronfin, *Muzïkalnaya kultura Petrograda*, 48.
10 Chemodanov, 'Muzïka i teoriya istoricheskogo materializma', 15–16.
11 Ibid., 16.
12 Ibid.
13 Igor Glebov, 'The Music of Mozart', *Zhizn iskusstva* [*Life of Art*] (4 September 1923), 7.
14 Glebov, *Zhizn iskusstva* (11 September 1923), 10.
15 Boris Shteynpress, 'Ob instrumentalnom tvorchestve Motsarta' ['On Mozart's Instrumental Music'], *Sovetskaya muzïka* [*Soviet Music*], 6 (1935), 44–5.
16 Ibid., 58.
17 The quotation in the heading is from Anatoly Lunacharsky, 'Velikie sestrï' ['Great Sisters'], *Muzïka i revoliutsitya*, 1 (1926), 16.
18 Quoted in H. C. Robbins-Landon, *Beethoven* (London, 1970), 118.
19 However, Lunacharsky had more adventurous tastes than Lenin; he was a supporter of avant-garde artistic movements in all fields of the arts and, like the modernist ASM, liked Skryabin's music.
20 Lunacharsky, 'Velikie sestrï', 16–17.
21 See the Moscow Conservatoire house journal *Muzïkalnoe obrazovanie* [*Music Education*], 2/1–2 (1927) for serious scholarly articles including a facsimile of Sketchbook No. 4, *Muzïka i revoliutsitya*, 3 (1927) for more political articles, and *Sovremennaya muzïka*, 21 (1927) for reports of Beethoven-related ASM concerts and lectures.
22 Evgeny Braudo, 'Betkhoven-grazhdanin' ['Beethoven-Citizen'], *Muzïka i revoliutsitya*, 3 (1927), 22–3.
23 See Pavel Veis, 'O zhurnale "Proletarsky muzïkant' ['About the Journal "Proletarian musician"'], *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 1 (1933), 135.
24 Boleslav Pshibïshevsky, 'O tvorcheskom metode Betkhovena' [Beethoven's Creative Method'], *Proletarsky muzïkant*, 5 (1931), 28. Pshibïshevsky here refers to the fact that Friedrich Wilhelm gave Hegel the post of rector at Berlin University in 1830. Beethoven's decision to dedicate his symphony to the Prussian king was financially motivated, since he was extremely poor at the end of his life.
25 Veis, 'O zhurnale "Proletarsky muzïkant"', 135.
26 N. Goncharova, 'Betkhoven v krasnoy armiy' ['Beethoven in the Red Army'], *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 7–8 (1935), 153.
27 Mikhail Pekelis, 'Frants Schubert', *Muzïka i revoliutsiya*, 10 (1928), 15.
28 Anon., *Muzïka i revoliutsiya*, 10 (1928), 41. Schubert's Eighth Symphony was the most popular of the cycle, with the Leningrad Philharmonia playing it 106 times 1921–71, compared with only fifteen performances of the Fifth. Persimfans had only symphonies nos. 8 and 9 in their repertoire. See Arapov et al., *Leningradskaya gosudarstvennaya ordena trudovogo krasnogo znameni filarmonia*, 359 and Ponyatovskiy, *Persimfans*, 190.
29 Mikhail Ivanov-Boretsky, 'E. T. A. Gofman' [E. T. A. Hoffmann], *Muzïkalnoe obrazovanie*, 3–4 (1926), 15.
30 Ivanov-Boretsky, 'Revoliutsionnïe khorï Shumana' ['Schumann's Revolutionary Choruses'] *Muzïkalnoe obrazovanie*, 2 (1930), 16–19.
31 Cheremukhin, 'K voprosu putyakh sovetskoy muzïki' ['On the Question of the Path for Soviet music'], *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 5 (1933), 24.
32 Georgy Khubov, 'Frants Liszt', *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 11 (1936), 24–5.
33 Arapov et al., '*Leningradskaya gosudarstvennaya ordena trudovogo krasnogo znameni filarmonia*', 343.
34 Ponyatovskiy, 'Persimfans', 188.
35 Ivan Sollertinsky, 'The Symphonies of Brahms', in Mikhail Druskin, ed., *Istoricheskie etyudi* [*Historical Studies*] (Leningrad, 1963), 279–82.
36 Lev Kaltat and David Rabinovich, 'V boyakh za nasleds tvo' ['Fighting for a Heritage'], *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 3 (1933), 13.
37 Ibid., 22–5.
38 See for example Sollertinsky's 1929 essay 'Problema sovetskogo simfonizma' ['The Problem of Soviet Symphonism'], *Zhizn iskusstva*, 46 (1929), 1–3.
39 Rabinovich, concert review, *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 7 (1938), 71. However, it should be borne in mind that some former RAPM members connected with the State music publisher Muzgiz tried to prevent the publication of new Soviet music in the early 1930s, and Rabinovich's complaint may have stemmed from similar hostility to new music as Soviet music was increasingly programmed in the late 1930s. See Simo Mikkonen, 'State Composers and the Red Courtiers: Music, Ideology and Politics in the Soviet 1930s' (Ph.D. diss., University of Jyväskalä, 2007), esp. 134–49.
40 'The last of the Mohicans' was the term used by Valeriyan Bogdanov-Berezovsky in his article 'On the Problem of Soviet Symphonism', *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 6 (1934), 30.

41 See Lyudmila Mikheyeva, *Pamyati I. I. Sollertinskogo* [*In Memory of I. I. Sollertinsky*] (Leningrad, 1978), 244–6.
42 For a discussion of Sollertinsky's role in introducing Mahler to Shostakovich and of his interpretation of Mahler's music as a model for Soviet composers, see Pauline Fairclough, 'Mahler Reconstructed: Sollertinsky and the Soviet Symphony', *Musical Quarterly*, 85/2 (2001), 367–90.
43 Aleksandr Ostretsov, *Sovetskaya muzïka*, 1 (1935), 73.
44 See Sollertinsky, *Gustav Mahler* (Leningrad, 1932).
45 Sollertinsky, 'Bruckner's Seventh Symphony', in Druskin, ed., *Istoricheskie etyudi* (Leningrad, 1963), 310.
46 Evgeny Braudo, 'Ob ekspressionizme v muzïke' ['On Expressionism in Music'], *Muzïkalnaya letopis* [*Music Chronicle*], 2 (1922), 150.
47 Ibid.
48 Cheremukhin, 'K voprosu o putyakh sovetskoy muzïki', 29.
49 See Henry-Louis de la Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, vol. III: *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904–1907)* (Oxford and New York, 1999), 165–6.
50 Leonid Sabaneyev, 'Richard Strauss', *K novïm beregam* [*Towards New Shores*], 2 (1923), 36.
51 Ibid., 37.
52 Ibid., 39.
53 See Mikkonen, 'State Composers', 136. Also see Lev Grigoryev and Yakov Platek, *Moskovskaya Gosudarstvennaya Filharmoniya* (Moscow, 1973), 93–111 for details of this shift in emphasis in concert repertoire, and for details of cycles of Wagner, Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Berlioz and Liszt in the 1937–8 Moscow Philharmonia season.