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Communism and Folklore Revisited: Russian Traditional Music and the Janus-faced Nature of Soviet Cultural Politics

ABSTRACT: Since the late Soviet period, ethnomusicologists and folklorists from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union (Izaly Zemtsovsky, Boris Putilov, Alma Kunanbaeva, Elena Razumovskaia, Aleksandr Romodin) opened critical debates of the impact of the totalitarian system both on traditional expressive culture and on scope, theory, and method of its academic study. In the focus of these debates were a) repression against certain traditional genres and performance situations, b) imposition of arranged forms of staged performance, considerably differing from the traditional repertoire, and c) restriction, manipulation, and international isolation of scholarship.

It is inherent to any totalitarianism that it demands not only obedience but also active support of a specific worldview through cultural practices. Consequently, totalitarian cultural politics include repressive as well as pedagogical aspects. Their impact on traditional music is therefore both repressive and in some (often unpredictable) ways productive.

While no historically informed observer could have reason to abandon the anti-totalitarian impetus of late 20th century Russian ethnomusicologists, I would like to offer some additions to a too simplified understanding of Soviet cultural politics impact on traditional culture. My main arguments are the following:

1. Repressive measures against traditional expressive culture, as well as the promotion of newly arranged folk music, often with a political motivation, are not a prerogative of Soviet cultural politics.
2. Stage performance in the framework of Soviet amateur art could include not only arranged folk music but also traditional forms.
3. Sometimes, Soviet reality provided new perspectives for a dynamic development of traditional expressive culture.

Introduction

Let me start with an episode from my very first fieldwork in the Russian-Belarusian border region Poozer'e in summer 1989. At that time, I was a student of Eastern Slavistics and Systematic musicology at the University of Hamburg, with some classes in modern Russian history and a (sometimes sympathetic) interest for socialist movements. Since first, I never have experienced any sympathy to Marxist-Leninist systems and second, it is impossible to read

Dostoyevsky and believe in socialism, I felt comfortable with the anti-Soviet sentiments of the perestroika period. Thanks to my informal mentor Alexander (Aleksandr) Romodin, I accessed secondhand and firsthand evidence on what *communism as reality* (Alexander Zinoviev) means in the countryside – famine, unpaid work in the kolkhozes without leisure days, severe control of economic and cultural activities, accompanied by the threat of deportation.

Against this background, I was surprised when Romodin, arriving in a larger village in the Rossony raion of the Vitebsk oblast, was looking for a good button-accordion (*garmonʹ*) player, and an elderly connoisseur of local music recommended – the *predsedatelʹ* (the director of the local kolkhoz)! How this can be? A representative of the Soviet system is engaged in traditional music and accepted by the people. For me it was the first indication that *communism and folklore* (Zemtsovsky, Kunanbaeva, 1997) might be not always as hermetically divided at it seemed to me earlier.

The experience of totalitarian rule is common to all Slavic-speaking countries. Unfortunately, this is not only an historical issue, but sadly topical – due to the actual return of totalitarianism to the country in question. While authoritarian systems demand from their subjects only general obedience to the prescriptions of law, totalitarian systems, be they communist, fascist/National Socialist or theocratic, claim for the active support of a specific worldview: Simone Weil, an early theorist of totalitarianism, defines the latter as a social organisation “in which the State power comes to exercise sovereign sway in all spheres, even, indeed above all, in that of thought” (Weil, 2001 [1934], p. 109). In such a state, obedience is being continuously reinforced through cultural practices. As these practices do not develop by an inner dynamic of a culture, totalitarian cultural politics beside repressive necessarily encompass also pedagogical interventions. Its impact on traditional music is therefore both restrictive and in some (often unpredictable) ways productive. It goes without saying that, due to the murderous consequences of totalitarian rule in the 20th century, its repressive aspects are in the foreground of critical debates. Or in the words of Mark Slobin: “As Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva point out, the backdrop of brutal repression was probably the most obvious distinctive feature of the USSR’s daily practice” (Slobin, 1997, p. 30). Not only for this reason, anti-totalitarian critique has its undeniable merits. Nevertheless, I would like to offer certain additions and corrections to a sometimes too simplified understanding of Soviet cultural politics in the heated ethnomusicological debates of late-20th century Russia. Regarding style and genre, I will focus generally more on instrumental music.

Critical debates

Estonian-born philologist Felix J. Oinas was one of the first to offer a critical overview on folklore and folkloristics under Soviet rule, naturally in exile. He describes the 1920s as “rich and fruitful in literary scholarship, including folkloristics” (1973, p. 45). However, what he calls the “brief period of considerable freedom” (*ibid.*) did not include the freedom of religious and oppositional

writers and of those intellectuals who were killed, imprisoned or forced into exile during the period of Lenin's Red Terror (1918–1921). In folkloristics, the limited pluralism came to an end when at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers (1934) Maxim Gorky “opened the eyes of the rulers of Russia to the significance of folklore as a powerful force to advance communism” (ibid., p. 47). Thus folklore, formerly denounced by the radical Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), came to be rehabilitated on the one hand and controlled on the other. One of the main tasks of folklorists now was “the introduction of organized Soviet folklore” (ibid., p. 48). In the post-war period “the ideological dictatorship of [Party Secretary Andrei] Zhadnov [...] developed into a full-scale anti-West witch hunt” (ibid., p. 53) which at the same time forced Russian folklorists to abandon nearly the whole intellectual legacy of pre-October times as “bourgeoisie” and “cosmopolitan”. Only the Khrushchev's Thaw since the late 1950s led to revitalisation of formalistic directions (Vladimir Propp) and the historic school and also of the study of formerly banned religious genres.

As Laura J. Olson has shown, the 1960s opened a space for a first wave of direct criticism of Soviet folklorism in the country itself (Olson, 2004, pp. 73–75). Musicologist and folklorist Fedosii Rubtsov criticised local cultural officials, “unable either to study the creative initiative of the masses or to stimulate its development”, for “implanting in amateur choirs a thematically approved, but by far not always high-grade repertoire, extremely narrowing and levelling the most rich tradition of the past and the creative work of the present” (1973 [1965], p. 179). Five years later, Rubtsov went further and took to task not the uneducated rural instructors (see also Zemtsovsky, 1965, cited in Olson, 2004, p. 60) but the very system of so-called “academic” Russian folk choirs. His insistence on “authentic” as opposed to “implanted” folk music (Olson, 2004, p. 74) may appear at first glance somewhat purist and traditionalist; however, Rubtsov's judgement is based on observations on fundamentally different aesthetics and frame of performance. It has to be noted that Rubtsov was anything but a purist, considering his critical discussion on folklorists' concepts of collectivity and anonymity, as well as of the widespread ignorance of contemporary and urban practices. Rubtsov's criticism of emblematic Soviet folk art “à la russe” (1970, p. 36) is strikingly close to Iurii Boiko's polemic, laconically titled “Russian folk instruments and the orchestra of Russian folk instruments” (1988, see Morgenstern, 1995, pp. 35, 36, 45, 46; Olson, 2004, pp. 17, 18), and in some way to Édouard Alekseev's analysis of Soviet amateur art (1988), to be discussed later.

Naturally, most of these debates on the aesthetics of folklore and fakedore, implying criticism of the totalitarian project of “Potemkin village folk culture” (Dmitri Pokrovsky after Levin, 1996, p. 28), had to be read between the lines. The situation changed dramatically during the period of Gorbachev's perestroika. A second wave directly addressed the cultural politics of the totalitarian system. In 1991 Elena Razumovskaia published a report “60 years of kolkhozes in the eyes of the peasants”. Given the very diverse views of the older generation in the South of the Pskov oblast, she singles out “painful motives of the common fate: expropriation [*dekulakizatsiia*], repression, war, famine, unpaid work, disenfranchisement, drunkenness, spiritual, cultural and moral impoverishment” (1991, p. 113).

Repressions against everyday expressive practices were common knowledge to any Russian folklorist. But Razumovskaia was among the first to address in public things like five years' prison for harmless satirical quatrains about a cow unwilling to join the kolkhoz or, about girls who must hide crosses and stop praying if the lover is a communist (1991, p. 123), or give evidence of a ban on "outdated music" (ibid., p. 123) like the contradance *kadrel'* or couple dances; etc.

Leading folklorist Boris Putilov, in a famous essay "Russian folkloristics at the gates of freedom" (1994)¹, particularly addressed the totalitarian impact on theory and method in academic scholarship, and the isolation of Soviet folkloristics and ethnomusicology from the international scientific community. The totalitarian system "not confining itself to prohibition, in addition forced our discipline (and found in it many supporters) to replace the real subject with an imagined one; the issue of contemporary folklore has undergone direct falsification, a myth of Soviet folklore glorifying our socialist life, the party leaders, praising the kolkhozes and the great working victories, has been created" (Putilov, 1994, p. 5). "Scholarly conferences, dissertations, edited volumes and monographs have been devoted to this phantom".

Izaly Zemtsovsky and Alma Kunanbaeva (1997) considerably extended what the Anglophone reader could know from Oinas' writings on the fate of academic scholarship. They pointed also to the repression against religious repertoires (notably Christian, Jewish and Shamanic), prison songs and "decadent" romances —and against the performers themselves, including executions of Central-Asian (but not Russian) epic singers, shamans and Ukrainian hurdy-gurdy players: "Entire peoples and genres were persecuted and, in some cases, destroyed through the government's efforts to purify folklore" (ibid., 6).

Both waves of criticism were echoed by Western ethnomusicologists, who did fieldwork in the late Soviet period, among them: Mark Slobin (1997), Theodore Levin (1997), Laura Olson (2004), and me (Morgenstern, 1995, 2011)². However, it became increasingly obvious that an antagonistic model with Soviet cultural politics on the one and the "presumed 'genuine' folklore" (Slobin, 1997, p. 30) on the other side would not cover the very complex and ambiguous reality of cultural life under Soviet rule. And Slobin proposed to contextualise the Soviet experience in a more global framework:

Many of the shortcomings of Soviet policies are merely part of an overall thrust of culture and society in the USSR that can be read as an exaggeration of tendencies found across Europe and the United States [...]. Specific attitudes towards folklore e.g., prudishness, are not just Soviet (ibid., 1997, p. 21).

¹ Putilov's brilliantly written and fundamental statement, both courageous and balanced, would deserve an English translation for many reasons – as an historical monument of free thought, when the gate of freedom was open at least for a few decades, and as an overview of what Russian folklorists were able to achieve under the conditions of the totalitarian system, anyway. To my knowledge, it was Putilov who has coined the term *monoteoria* (mono-theory).

² I find Zemtsovsky's and Kunanbaeva's discussion of Merab Mamardashvili's *linguistic oppression* particularly fruitful (and for different reasons very relevant at present): "when life itself becomes an endless process of naming and re-naming, and when not just ideological but linguistic insubordination is punished" (1997, p. 21).

Neither specifically Soviet is the idea that “religious thought was alien to folklore: true folklore supposedly stood in opposition to Christianity” (Zemtsovsky & Kunanbaeva, 1997, p. 5). *Paganophilia* (Aleksandr B. Strakhov) is a corner stone in Romanticist folkloristics, and later also in National Socialism. One can also add one argument in an organological context:

the fiddle was condemned as a bourgeois instrument in the Ukraine. In many Ukrainian villages, traditional fiddles were destroyed piece by piece [...]. Consequently, an end came to the famous Ukrainian instrumental groups (*troista muzyka*), and Jewish bands (*klezmer kapella*) were replaced by brass bands as a symbol of the new Soviet militarized reality (ibid., p. 15).

I could not find, however, any evidence for a general ban of the violin in Ukraine in the writings of Ihor Macijewski and William Noll, leading experts in *troista muzyka*. And the replacement of small fiddle-based ensembles by brass bands is a general process in 19th-century Europe, with no exception for klezmer music: “It is certain that brass instruments [...] were in common usage in klezmer ensembles throughout the Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe by the last quarter of the nineteenth century” (Rubin, 2009, p. 79).

Repressive measures against traditional expressive culture in Pre-revolutionary Russia

In a response to certain anti-totalitarian polemics in Morgenstern 2011, Petersburg musicologist Mikhail Lobanov (1943–2015) in a personal letter dated 11 June 2013 objected that in Russian history “one mythology (the Bolshevik) was replaced by another (the Liberal)” and pointed to a tendency “to blame *sovdepiya* [invective for the USSR] for all sins of the Russian state, and to perceive everything what has been before the Bolsheviks as idyllic”. Referring to forced Christianisation of the peoples of the Russian North, Lobanov argued that repressions against Shamans took part not only under Soviet rule.

Of course, my colleague was right, and we should not ignore repressive tendencies in the music politics of the secular and religious powers in 19th-century Russia, as evident from numerous critical accounts by progressive and courageous scholars. For instance, *posidelki* (spinning rooms), a key institution for the socialisation of adolescents and for the formation of their aesthetic interests and capacities (Romodina, 1990), were under repression not only in the Stalin and Khrushchev periods. Folklorist Aleksandr Rozov provides evidence not only of continuous attacks against *posidelki*, “dangerous for morality” in diocesan press (Rozov, 2008b, p. 398), but also of administrative prohibition in the Penza (ibid.) and the Olonets Governorates (Rozov, 2008a, p. 375).

The *posidelki* themselves may indicate that traditional gatherings are not always as attractive for the individuals involved as it seems to the folklorists. Mikhail Lur’e (1995) has shown in detail that erotic games in the Christmas and New Year period (*sviatki*) included verbal behaviour and unwanted sexual actions which female participants could experience as extremely humiliating. Thus, not only intrusion in traditional expressive culture by church and secular authorities

but also the very nature of that culture give reason to doubt the idyllic picture, as pointed out by Lobanov.

Invented traditions: Balalaika-domra orchestras

In the perestroika period emblems of officious Soviet folk choirs and orchestras became a red rag for folklorists and tradition-oriented revivalists, but also for nearly the whole musically educated intelligentsia. The origins of the balalaika-domra orchestra are to be found in the urban elites of Saint Petersburg. The Soviet narrative depicts Vasilii Andreev and his fellow musicians as unfairly maligned idealists who only after 1917 received full support of the people and the government. In fact, Olga Shabunina has shown that the “Great Russian Orchestra” in March 1914 was granted by Tsar Nicholas II the sum of 25,000 roubles annually (2019, p. 166). More critically than Shabunina, Richard Stites gives evidence of the political background of Andreev’s project:

Maria Dolina, a devoted monarchist and singer, gave hundreds of benefit concerts [for invalids during WW1] that offered folk songs, balalaika bands, martial ensembles, songs set to the words of the famous anti-Semitic publicist Pavel Krushevan and readings of official edicts and texts provided by the Russian right (Stites, 1999, p. 23).

Among these “balalaika bands” was Andreev’s orchestra which took part in Dolina’s “Slavic Concerts” and similar Slavophile events from 1904 (Shabunina, 2019, pp. 126, 128). Thus, the systematic use of arranged Russian folk music for political goals is not a Soviet invention.

Concerning the “artificial” nature of Andreev’s orchestra, we can concede that it is much more different from oral tradition in terms of morphology, instrumentation, playing techniques, and also style and repertoire than in most other European revival projects (yet very close to the re-invention of the chromatic *tamburica* in Croatia a few decades earlier). However, initiatives for the “nobilitation” (Pecher-Havers, 2021) of folk musical instruments, even if less radical in character, are a common phenomenon, since the revival and standardisation of the Alphorn in early 19th century Switzerland: “National cultural norms in nearly every region of Europe were constructed by specific people who altered peasant cultural norms, absorbing some, destroying others” (Noll, 1993, p. 59). Prominent examples from the pre-Soviet period are:

1. the modernisation of the bandura initiated by intellectuals and educated musicians in the Ukraine by Hnat Khotkievich (Hornjatkevyč, 2008, p. 139);
2. the modernisation of the Baltic psaltery *kanklės* in Lithuania by church organist Pranas Puskunigis (1860–1946) and his *kanklės* ensemble, founded in 1906;
3. The revival of the analogous *kokle* “following the patterns found in classical music” (Muktupāvels, 2009, p. 5) in Latvia prior to the Soviet occupation.

The reason for the general antipathy against the balalaika-domra orchestra during the perestroika period is not its origin as an invented tradition, as such traditions flourished everywhere. The reason is its promotion by the state as the preferred if not the only accepted form of playing Russian folk musical instruments, and therefore its emblematical association with the totalitarian system. This association was entirely different in the case of the modernised bandura, firstly as even the largest bandura capellas in the Soviet period were closer to 19th-century pre-revival practice than the radically modernised balalaika—and secondly for the reason that unlike most balalaika enthusiasts, nearly all leading figures of the fist bandura revival were either shot or forced into exile during Stalin's Great Terror.

Khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost' – organized amateur art

Immediately after the Bolshevik takeover, Andreev and his fellow musicians readily put themselves at the service of the new rulers – be it out of opportunism, disastrous living conditions or for sharing common ideas on how to develop the musical taste of the masses. However, the first People's Commissar for Education, Anatolii Lunacharskii, strongly preferred “the musical impact on the masses, particularly in the village, through the accordion [garmonika]”, as he wrote in a famous article “The button accordion in the service of the revolution” (1929, p. 119). In June 1926, at the First conference of accordion players and foresingers [*zapevala*] in Moscow “issues of repertoire and its cleansing from low-quality music were raised with particular sharpness” (Vertkov, 1975, p. 216). The komsomol (centralised communist youth organisation) was appointed to the “leadership over the accordion” (ibid.). In October of the same year a competition in Leningrad, initiated by party leader Sergei Kirov, included 96 accordion and 82 balalaika players. Interestingly, “the musicians' repertoire was not regulated” (Vertkov, p. 219). Consequently, more traditional melodies changed with “rather great many pieces of the light genre” (Vertkov, p. 221). Contemporary cultural activists and musical writers lamented on the prevalence of *slukhachi* (musicians, playing by heart) and the partly “vulgar” repertoire (Vertkov, pp. 219, 221). In the following 14 months, according to Lunacharskii (1929, p. 121) at 2,500 competitions 30,000 accordion players performed for 3,000,000 listeners.

In the early 1930s, organised folk music events became radically narrowed. At the Fifth Olympiad of amateur art (1931), Iosif Nemtsev called for “a decisive fight against apoliticality at the musical front” (Vertkov, p. 226). This new wave of politicisation was radically different from the pluralism of musical styles and the creative anarchy of the post-civil war years. It is no coincidence that the CPSU in 1935, at the very beginning of High Stalinism, initiated a department for “Cultural-enlightenment work”, as musicologist Sergei Rumiantsev and theater scholar Aleksei Shul'pin (2000, p. 18) noted in a fundamental study of Soviet amateur art—the infamous *khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*. Now “culture became an object of planning in a general government dimension” (ibid., p. 19)

with the goal of an “amalgamation of all layers and elements of culture” (ibid., p. 18) through a “militarization of culture and everyday life” (ibid., p. 11). Paradoxically, *khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'* “would be ‘do-it-yourself-ism” (Olson, 2004, p. 74); however, personal or collective initiative was largely absent (see also Rubtsov, 1974, after Olson, p. 74). High Stalinism was also the period when the local history movement and many other cultural initiatives and volunteer organisations fell under repression (Rumiantsev, Shul'pin, 2000, p. 21).

Rumiantsev gives much evidence on manipulative and repressive intervention in local styles and repertoires. In the Pskov oblast, a choir, established in the 1920s at rural spinning rooms and weddings became disoriented by a local cultural house leader, trying to introduce contemporary Soviet songs which brought the ensemble “out of harmony [*razladila*]”, as one singer complained (2000, p. 286). At the same time, precisely in this period, selected local traditions, formerly despised as backward and “anti-proletarian”, were promoted in the spirit of Russo-centric Stalinist nationalism. Only a few years after millions of peasants have been deported, executed or died from starvation, “the Russian peasant” again became a nationalist icon. Epic singers were spotlighted at public concerts in Moscow, and, on such occasions, forced to create poems on the Soviet leaders, as shown by Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva (1997, p. 9). Not surprisingly, their judgement on *samodeiatel'nost'* is harsh: “The strictest censorship was imposed on everything that was published and performed, including every sound that was played” (ibid., 1997, p.5).

During the late 20th century *samodeiatel'nost'* was *the* negative model for virtually all Russian ethnomusicologists, for nationalist and liberal revivalists, and of course for connoisseurs of Western art music. In colloquial Russian, *samodeiatel'nost'* can often denote any non-professional and ineffective activity. Against this background, Édouard Alekseev's book *Folklore in the context of contemporary culture* (1988) presents a rarely nuanced view. Like Rubtsov, he is critical of the general ignorance of mainstream amateur music of local traditions, and also its orientation on professional art and staged performance (1988, p. 97). However, Alekseev takes *samodeiatel'nost'* seriously as a phenomenon in its own right, identifying parallels between “spontaneous *samodeiatel'nost'*” and “traditional folklore”, as “both live and develop only in the framework of a stable social milieu” (1988, p. 100).

In some way, Alekseev's essay anticipates Rumiantsev's and Shul'gin's studies, marking a radical break with the largely antagonistic narrative of the perestroika time. From the perspective of history of everyday life, these studies present *samodeiatel'nost'* as a culturally meaningful sphere for large parts of the society.

Existing at the boundaries between art and everyday life, ideology and elementary emotions, *samodeiatel'nost'* at the same time appears as a part of institutionalised culture and as a sphere of immediate manifestation of the people's creative life (Rumiantsev, Shul'gin, 2000, p. 7).

When Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva point to “the regime's aim of total control of all cultural activities (1997, p. 5), this doesn't mean that aim has been always and everywhere achieved. This is particularly important for the hidden

life of banned popular genres. Rumiantsev and Shul'gin (2000, p. 88) give evidence of a performance by Russian war-refugee children in 1944 when the so-called "cruel romances", prisoners' and criminal songs, have been "smuggled" in a performance in a local cultural house in North Caucasus, as a part of the unofficial after-show section: "And the audience perfectly understood the logic of this 'double book-keeping': First 'as it is supposed to be' [*kak nado*], and then 'for the soul' [*dlia dushi*]" . Not only the repertoire of *samodeiatel'nost'* but also the whole mode of performance could be more dynamic and more traditional than instructors intended, and folklorists noticed: "a large part of folk song choirs and ensembles performed their 'repertoire' by heart, in improvisatory manner" (Rumiantsev, 2000, p. 290).

Traditional instrumental styles and genres on stage

The most emblematic expression of Soviet-style folk-like Russian instrumental music are balalaika-domra orchestras, the concert button-accordion *baian* as a virtuosic solo instrument and as an accompaniment for singing—and their simplified derivatives promoted in a huge body of tutorials and sheet music. Beside this centralised standard style, however, the framework of local amateur art sometimes offered niches for performance largely based on oral/aural tradition. One prominent example is the *Vladimirskie rozhechniki*, ensembles of wooden-trumpets, played by illiterate shepherds, which were extremely popular



Figure 1. A *rozhechniki* ensemble, directed by Aleksandr Sulimov (not before 1936, unknown photographer, Vorontsov 1990, p. 204)

in the late 19th/early 20th centuries among the urban elites. After a short break the *rozhechniki* have been revitalised in 1936 by former shepherd Aleksandr Sulimov who was appointed as a musical instructor in the Red Army and after WWII in the *samodeiatel'nost'* (Vorontsov, 1990, p. 204). Thus, preserving the late 19th century style and instrumentation, the Soviet *rozhechniki* (Figure 1.) continued to play in Russia and abroad old-time melismatic songs and dance tunes, as well as the popular and the “official” repertoire of their time.

Even the famous ensemble of Dorozhëvo (Kursk oblast) with their traditionally narrow-ranged vocal heterophony and trichordal panpipe (*kuvikly*) tunes, in the 1930s was named a “Folk choir” and took part in the Briansk raion competition (*olimpiada*) in 1939. Regardless of the fact that they never fitted in the official Soviet style and repertoire, they received the second place. However, as musicologist Lev Kulakovskii observed, “the significance of the patterns of folk art demonstrated has not been realised” (1940, p. 69, cf. Rumiantsev, 2000, p. 290). In a similar way, the last pre-revival double reedpipe players in the Voronezh, Pskov, and maybe the Belgorod oblasts in the late 20th century, were included in the system of *khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel'nost'*.

In the context of staged amateur art, Russian panpipes and reed pipes, like post-WWII bagpipe music in the Carpathian Basin, “entered the ‘curiosity’ category” (Végh, Horváth, 2022, p. 63) – and only a few folk music specialists were aware of their value for historical research. The status of the famous *gusli* is a little different, due to the instruments’ association with the time-honoured epic repertoire. When Anatolii Mekhnetsov in the 1980s discovered a vanishing tradition of the Baltic psaltery (*gusli krylovidnye*) in the Pskov and later in the Novgorod oblast, he tried to present the *gusli* as nearly forgotten relics from the mists of time, located first of all in traditional rural scenarios. However, Tatiana Barinova (1914–1992), one of the idols for many a revivalist, as early as in the pre-WWII period was encouraged by cultural workers to play in public in the *samodeiatel'nost'* (Wiki.pskovedu). Later she was invited to Moscow, and in the 1960s she regularly played at official mass celebrations (*narodnye gulianii*). This is not an exception: According to Flavii Sokolov (1959, pp. 135–141) three of four *gusli* players he worked with in 1957 were members of the famous ensemble *Gdovskaia starina* (“Old times in Gdov”, s. Rumiantsev, 2000, pp. 291–294). One *chastushka* tune from another player was recorded on phonograph in 1936 at the First oblast competition of workers’ and kolkhoz *samodeiatel'nost'* in Leningrad (*ibid.*, p. 145).

Even in Chuvashia where we know about “mass repression in the 1930s among Chuvash musicians who were persecuted as ‘nationalist’ and ‘counter-revolutionaries” (Zemtsovsky & Kunanbaeva, 1997, p. 14), the local folk art centre (Dom narodnogo tvorchestva) of Cheboksary, launched a competition of traditional *gusli* (*kësle*) players and makers in 1936³, in which leading communist, Iliia Iashtaikin, a *gusli* player from childhood himself, took part.

³ Some online sources indicate that a photo of this competition belongs to the Russian Ethnographic Museum. I am not able to verify this, but the photo can be found with the search phrase „Конкурс гуслиров и мастеров по производству гуслей”.

As we can see, local traditions of instrumental music, not fitting into the mainstream of Soviet folk music politics, could sometimes find a place in the system of amateur art. However, this was not typical.

Dynamic developments of traditional expressive culture under Soviet rule

One general tendency of rural music live in Russia is the organic adaption of numerous popular genres, promoted by radio and print media: “the inhabitants of tiny villages view nationally popular ‘folk songs’ as their own songs” (Olson, 2004, p. 184). This includes late 19th century sentimental songs and romances, as well as Soviet mass songs, as far as they were compatible to traditional aesthetics. Folklorists, notably in the comparatively liberal periods after Stalin’s death, didn’t like to include too much of this repertoire in local song collections and commented, if ever, on the preferences of their research partners only briefly. Thus, the idea of “artificially implanted” new repertoires ignores the productive process of stylistic adaptation (what Boris Asafiev called *pereintonirovanie* – “articulatory re-intoning”).

The adaptive capacities of local communities are not limited to style and repertoire. After Ekaterina Dorokhova and Olga Pashina: “[t]raditional culture is an open system, capable to perceive and to appropriate many trends of modern time” (2017, p. 358). The authors identified dynamic capacities and instances of unintended actualisation of traditional genres in the Soviet period – however against a most horrible background of the cataclysms of that time. In North Russia 14-year-old girls, who were forced to ruinous hand work in a seven-day regime as lumberjacks, at informal gatherings performed traditional wedding laments, adapted to their actual situation (*ibid.*, p. 344). New Year and Eastern carolling was revived “for fully pragmatic reasons. Under extreme poverty of the rural population the participation in the seasonal customs often became the only means of obtaining food” (*ibid.*, p. 348). Nearly forgotten recruits’ laments and other genres related to military service not only accompanied the Second World War but also the war “in Afghanistan and in the Caucasus” (*ibid.*, p. 354)⁴. Even the Chernobyl disaster and its dramatic consequences revived ritual genres and “the magic of the human voice as the last remaining means of rescue” (*ibid.*, p. 356).

One of the most productive aspects of Soviet cultural politics for traditional music is the availability of comparatively cheap musical instruments. The forced production of balalaikas and button accordions in the 1930s revived the century-old tradition of every-household instruments after the devastation of two wars. New types of ensembles emerged where these instruments were often played together with the mandolin and the guitar. Remarkable is the increasing role of female performance, at least in the framework of small private gatherings. And this is only logical: when female teenagers were forced to fulfil traditional tasks of men in the kolkhoz economy – why they should not play at least the balalaika?

⁴This probably doesn’t refer to the military aggression against Ukraine after 2014, as the undeclared war is not present as such in the popular consciousness.

The fate of traditional musical instruments demonstrates the Janus-faced nature of Soviet cultural politics with all its selective approaches between repression and support. While accordions of different quality, mostly the unisonoric *khromka*, were produced in the factories of Tula and other big cities, local accordion production by rural craftsmen came to an end with the collectivisation, when individual instrument makers were expropriated in the same way as individual farmers. For instance, the sophisticated and richly decorated bisonoric three to five-row button accordion of the Novorzhevaion (*novorzhevskaiia garmon'*) in the Pskov oblast (Fig. 2, 3), traditionally produced as a side business of farmers after a ten-year apprenticeship (Morgenstern, 2007, p. 116), came to an end in the 1930s. Another local bisonoric button accordion had a better fate: the one-row Saratov accordion (*saratovskaia garmon'*) was a popular tourist souvenir in Soviet times and survived until the 21st century. The reason is, of course, not some sympathy or antipathy of Soviet bureaucrats to a specific type of the accordion, but the centralised production in the city of Saratov which provided easier conditions for the nationalisation of the existing manufactures.



Figure 2. Foma Vasiliev (b. 1930) with a *Novorzhevskaiia* button accordion from the workshop of Grigori Ivanov (b. 1902?) in Myl'nevo, Novorzhevaion, Pskov oblast). Fieldwork in Ivantsevo, Dedovichiraion, Pskov oblast', 5 May 1995.



Figure 3. Detail of the same instrument

Local professionalism in folk music— a phenomenon of the Soviet period?

In the liner notes of one of the few fieldwork-based records issued by the company *Melodiia* in the perestroika period, Alexander Romodin and Irina Romodina make the following observation:

In the Gorodok raion of the Vitebsk oblast of Belarus live remarkable musicians, mastering the art of virtuous button accordion. Such a solid tradition of folk performance art against the background of a peasant culture brutally destroyed for decades is a rarity nowadays. [...] Many of the masters made a living exclusively on the means earned with their musical art (Romodin, Romodina, 1990).

This was indeed a great discovery, and I was privileged to meet these musicians and to assist in the production of the record. The acknowledgement of “folk professionalism” (ibid.) was another, more implicit critique of the totalitarian system (Morgenstern, 2011, p. 260–262, Morgenstern, 2017, p. 77), as Soviet cultural politics limited traditional musicians’ status nearly exclusively to amateur art. However, ethno-organology of Europe (Felix Hoerburger, Erich Stockmann, Bálint Sárosi, William Noll) indicates that in Central-Eastern and Eastern Europe music has been predominantly an additional source of income of peasants and craftsmen (Morgenstern, 2017, p. 77), typically of those with low income and low social standing. A field study from late-19th century Belarus perfectly fits into this picture. Ethnographer Nikolai Nikiforovskii describes instrumental music (basically fiddling) as a source of additional income of less well-off men at an age of 15 to 40 years: “These individuals don’t make a living exclusively with musical work, as the urban musicians do” (Nikiforovskii, 1892, p. 187). As a rule, a musician stopped performing earlier if he got married (ibid.). While a fiddler would receive expressions of greatest admiration even from “the most unattainable beauties” (ibid., p. 189) during his performance, in everyday life his lower social status becomes apparent: “Like the beauty, even more her parents, see the *muzyka* [the fiddler] as a not fully reliable person and they know that he is not able to feed with his playing either a wife or children” (ibid.).

Thus, the question is: since when and under what conditions this kind of folk professionalism could evolve? Quite often skilful musicians and singers gain high social prestige, precisely if they do *not* depend on their art as an additional income (on Russian Alekseev, 1988, p. 92, Morgenstern, 2017, p. 78). But the Northern Belarusian accordion players presented on the record are often full professionals by economic criteria. To be sure, they all had official employments in other than musical spheres. Ivan Ivlev was a railroad worker, Nikolai Danilov worked in the local cinema. So, how did such musicians make a living *predominantly* with musical performances? An official status of a free-lance musician was unthinkable in the Soviet system, as any free-lance activities were illegal. Nevertheless, private shadow (or second) economy was very widespread at that time among poorly paid professionals such as teachers, doctors and many others who never could make a living from their legal income (Rutgaizer, 1992). Naturally in rural settings it would be ridiculous to speak of a “shadow economy”,

as any economic activities are more or less visible and well-known to the whole community. Given the enormous cultural significance of a wedding musician in Northern Belarus with all his responsibility for a proper wedding ceremony, it is likely that the local authorities, at least in the post-Stalin period, were ready to tacitly accept the musicians' (strictly speaking) illegal activities. While the social reputation of public accordion playing in the villages heavily suffered from the often misleading associations during Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaigns, I have never heard about restrictions against paid performances at weddings. With regard to the musicians presented on Romodina's and Romodin's record, they enjoyed the greatest admiration of the head of the Culture department of Gorodok, Zoia A. Zholud' who was also highly supportive towards the fieldworkers from Leningrad. This is a rare, but important counterpoint to the generally sad picture.

Similar questions arise with regard to professional folk musicians of the Hutsuls in the Carpathian Ukraine, as discussed in numerous studies by Ihor Macijewski. Reliable historical sources indicate that until the last third of the 19th century in this region, the Ruthenians in the lowlands used to engage wedding musicians (fiddlers, cimbalom players) from outside their communities – Jews and later Gypsies. In the mountains, solo aerophones (flutes, bagpipes) and fiddles played solo seemed to predominate (Morgenstern, 2017, p. 81–85). Oskar Kolberg (1888) provides early evidence on the fiddle-cimbalom duo among the Hutsuls (Fig. 4). Kolberg mentions the fiddle-tambourine, fiddle-cimbalom (p. 2) and the fiddle-basy (p. 3) ensemble. The cimbalom is used more in “larger gatherings” (p. 2). Raimund Friedrich Kaindl (1894, p. 11) mentions the fiddle, five different



Fig. 4. A dance scene near Obertyn (Ivano-Frankivsk oblast). Oskar Kolberg (1888, before p. 1)

aerophones, but not the cimbalom. Kolberg gives important evidence on travelling Gypsy and Jewish musicians (1888, p. 2), but also on local Hutsul musicians who played for dancing by annual contract as well as for weddings, paid separately (*ibid.*). Kaindl mentions “domestic Hutsuls” as dance musicians but also highly esteemed Gypsies (1894, p. 11). Thus, the most authoritative ethnographers of late 19th century (on Kolberg see Smoluch, 2014) present a dynamic multi-ethnic scenario of music making which seems to correspond to the general framework of semi-professionalism.

How, from this historical background, can we explain today’s exceptional high social status of Carpathian Ukrainian, Hutzul, wedding musicians? I am not familiar with recent socioeconomic investigations on this delicate issue, comparable with that of Speranța Rădulescu in Romania (1996). However, we cannot exclude that the reason for the impressive rise of full-professional musicianship in traditional contexts in the 20th century is similar to the situation in Belarus. It would follow that prospect for an acceptable living based to a considerable degree on performing traditional music is a recent phenomenon and (strangely enough), typical more of the Soviet period.

Conclusion

Soviet policies towards traditional music cannot adequately be studied only with regard to their obvious destructive aspects. A wide range of interventive strategies encompassed a continuum between most brutal repression and sensitive support. Generally speaking, the first is both an agency of the state but also of local inspectors, the second is first of all an initiative of idealistic individuals or sometimes local institutions. The most evident strategies are the following.

- Physical extermination or labour camps (often with the same consequences) for performing inappropriate vocal or instrumental music: shamanic genres, Central Asian epics, the hurdy-gurdy in Ukraine
- Ban of selected genres, most of all during High Stalinism: “decadent” popular genres, prison songs, klezmer music (after 1949).
- Ban of traditional performance situations: Self-organised dance events, spinning rooms, parish fairs
- Control over style and repertoire, purification and standardisation of traditional forms of music making, introduction of new forms of music making
- Promotion of new styles and repertoire and musical instruments, acceptable in traditional settings.
- Promotion of selected local forms of traditional expressive culture as “inner exoticism” (Hermann Bausinger)
- Idealistic support of local performers with no or minor stylistic interventions

Let me conclude with a statement by Mark Slobin who, maybe, like no other Western ethnomusicologist, throughout his career faced both the perilous consequences of oppressive regimes for traditional music and of the dynamics of expressive culture of modernity:

Locally, as we have come to learn, non-scholarly activists used the very structures of cultural bureaucracy, like the House of Culture, to support as well as distort folklore repertoires, traditions, and attitudes. As elsewhere, the nation-state's intrusion into local life was complex, sometimes contradictory, and always somewhat uneven, allowing for certain spaces of non-normative behaviour to open up (Slobin, 1997, p. 28).

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