

The Rhythms of NEP: The Fox Trot Calls the Time

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Abstract

In this article, Lyubov Ginzburg examines the cultural, ideological, and artistic intersections during the New Economic Policy (NEP) era in Soviet Russia. Ginzburg's central argument is that jazz and its associated dance forms, epitomized by Dmitri Shostakovich's orchestration of Vincent Youman's "Tea for Two," became a site of tension between innovation and state ideology. The author illustrates how jazz symbolized both modernist aspirations and capitalist decadence, prompting reactions from Soviet authorities to regulate its perceived disruptive social and sexual dynamics. The article situates jazz within global and Soviet contexts, exploring its resonance across cultural and political spheres.

The Rhythms of NEP

The Fox Trot Calls the Time

Lyubov Ginzburg

The following article recalls several New Economic Policy (NEP)-era anecdotes that intricately intertwine ideology, politics and culture, revealing the universal and humanistic nature of the latter and arguing that it may become a prevailing and uncontrollable force running afoul of those in power to define its norms and preferences, shape trends and shepherd developments. The case in point is a historical vignette convolving around the peripeteias of a popular American jazz tune in the maze of late-1920s Soviet cultural space. In spite of being patently emblematic of the epoch, the story behind Dmitri Shostakovich's orchestration of Youmans's "Tea for Two" has previously been referred to by scholars of Russian history and arts only occasionally and in passing. Yet when revisited within a broader context impregnated with an array of new circumstances and participants, the episode becomes bestowed with new meanings and symbols that reverberate into such disciplines as comparative studies and international relations.

As an overture, the article contextualizes NEP not only as an era when the Soviets were infatuated with American technological advances, contemplating the application of principles of Fordism and Taylorism within Soviet social organization,¹ but also as a time, when they had a soft spot for "a kind of Taylorism of the dance floor," and an innovative American art form known as jazz. The article examines how cultural gatekeepers and guardians of social norms, behavior and morality in Russia and in the United States reacted to jazz that firmly established itself as a "trend setter" in modish dances and flapper fashion. It argues that in spite of obvious ideological distinctions in the treatment of syncopated rhythms, the condemnation in both countries was conditioned by a similar desire of authorities to mitigate the effects of "social and sexual upheaval" triggered by "the kinesthetic spectacles" of jazz (Gordon 1996:424-425), winning respective prodigal citizenry back to virtue.

¹ This tendency is described in many works dedicated to NEP. See, for example, Fitzpatrick, Sheila, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites, eds. 1991. *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. Especially the essay by Jeffrey Brooks "The Press and Its Message: Images of America in the 1920s and 1930s," 231-252 (239-240). See also Ball, Alan M. 2003. *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, INC., especially Part I.

Among other influential artistic personalities contributing to Shostakovich's interest in innovative music, the article features Valentin Yakovlevich Parnakh (1891-1951), who was at the center of the debate about American jazz, when its "raucous sound" and the novelty dances associated with it "enthused and confounded" Soviet theatre, and when the cultural establishment attempted to define it within an authentic social and national context, "befitting the needs of the first workers' state" (Gordon 1996: 423). This central figure in the history of jazz in the Soviet Union was silenced and died in obscurity. Even in the West, his name and achievements in the theory of dance, languages and poetry, as well as his passionate endeavor to introduce jazz to the Russian stage, emerged from oblivion only at the very end of the twentieth century, notably with the publication of an article entitled "Valentin Parnakh, Apostle of Eccentric Dance" by famed and unorthodox drama scholar Mel Gordon, in 1996.

The discussion about Shostakovich's experimentations with syncopated music is placed within the context of the expanding theatre mania that swept through the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik victory, and was, according to Gordon, "unparalleled in European culture since the French Revolution" (1982:2). It analyses multiple attempts by Parnakh and like-minded theatre directors, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold and Sergei Tret'yakov, to integrate jazz with its sense of improvisation and quickened rhythms into innovative productions, first as a purely esthetic element, that broke through the constraints of traditional means of expression, and, later, as a propaganda tool incorporated to denounce the decadent west in an ongoing ideological struggle.

Also observed are the "competing notions of the primitive and the modern" (Gordon 1996:425)—the stigma imposed on the non-European origins of jazz as discordant and uncivilized is compared with Parnakh's belief that the new cultural idiom would unlock "unfettered elements of the new age" (Ibid.), rebuffing alleged racial stereotypes and emphasizing the interconnectedness and continuity between various cultural forms from all over the world.

Finally, by contemplating the fate of the innovative Soviet artists, who were directly or indirectly associated with Shostakovich's attempts to transcend genres and styles, the article suggests the exploration of the inner struggle sparked by the realization that creative aspirations and pursuits may not be possible without artistic and ideological compromise with Soviet ideologues. The narrative builds upon scholarly contributions of those researchers who studied infamous ideological skirmishes with so-called formalism that put an end to the raging experimentation in Soviet theater and music in the 1920s and 1930s,² recalling how, along with other modern art forms and artistic trends, jazz was disparaged as a cultural and ideological pariah, while its practitioners were silenced, persecuted and prosecuted.

² See for example Bliss Eaton, Katherine, ed. 2002. *Enemies of the People: The Destruction of Soviet Literary, Theater, and Film Arts in the 1930s*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Fox-trotting to communism: jazz craze at the dawn of socialism

At the beginning of the 1920s, as the young socialist state was recovering from the First World War, the revolution, its aftermath, and the civil war, the dictatorial policies of War Communism were being replaced with the so-called New Economic Policy (NEP) intended to provide a “breathing space” for Soviet society and impose “a new timetable” on the transition to socialism. It was now to be built gradually “through cultural work, rather than through political and military struggle” (Gorsuch 2008:177). New social and political conditions were taking shape, with small private businesses legalized, and control over cultural production languished. That period of relative freedoms in economics and culture revealed “profound connections and continuities” between a young socialist state and the West (Gorsuch 2008:175), resulting in an influx of Western mass media imagery permeating rather porous physical and cultural borders. Fashionistas were drawn toward economic extravagances and “decadent” Western-influenced cultural idioms, including the ‘flapper’ sensation of “frivolous modern dance,” and the “seductive rhythms of American jazz” (Gorsuch 1994:3; Gorsuch, 2008:175).

Large Russian cities, no less than thriving international ports and world capitals, were “enthralled” by American music and dance; the Charleston, Shimmy, and Fox Trot became “perennially modish dances” and the entertainment industry “was in one way or another intertwined with that new art form from America that was called “jazz” (Kater 1992:5). For Soviet ‘flappers’ and ‘fox trotters,’ jazz meant, above all, the emphatic syncopated rhythm that one could dance to. The term “jazz” was used to describe a wide variety of dance compositions, even though they were also labeled more specifically by their steps. A prime example is Youmans’s “Tea for Two,” one of myriad compositions referred to as a “jazzy tune”. The basic rhythm of “Tea for Two” is dotted quarter, followed by an eighth note, analogous to the various permutations of ‘first slow, then quick step sequences in the fox trot, though dancers need not be limited to those patterns.’³

Dance mania in Russia reflected a postwar, European-wide rejection of “the sober and self-controlled respectability so common to the Victorian era” (Gorsuch 1994:9). For many of those who “flocked to dance the fox trot” in the unsettled and contentious environment of the 1920s the vibrant new dances were “an emotional retreat”, “an antidote to the traumas of war and revolution and post-revolutionary problems” (Gorsuch 2008:176, 184; Gorsuch 1994:8). For many the desire to imitate frivolous Western styles also reflected their deviation from certain patterns of “traditional” and persistently imposed working-class culture (Gorsuch 2008:184-185). Soviet performers labeled their acts as “American dances”, and domestic jazz ensembles, such as Teplitsky’s First Concert Jazz Band, advertised their repertoire as featuring “the latest American music”, well aware that it would attract larger audiences (Starr 1983:69). Young communists were not immune to the order of the day, and “to the dismay of Bolshevik moralists, dancing the fox trot and the tango seemed to take place everywhere”, including Komsomol

³ I would like to acknowledge jazz critic and author Kevin Whitehead, who taught jazz history at the University of Kansas and who kindly and patiently explained to me the peculiarities of rhythmical patterns of fox trot in general and “Tea for Two” in particular.

and factory clubs (Gorsuch 2008:183). As Frederick Starr concluded in *Red and Hot*, the fundamental study of the history of jazz in Russia and the Soviet Union, “Russia was fox-trotting to communism and when the official publishers could not meet the demand for new fox trot melodies, the writers published them on their own, often engaging the best designers to do the covers” (1983:59).

“The inventor of stanzas and dances”: early Russian advocate of jazz as a universal and humanistic artistic form

For one of the earliest advocates of that new American cultural idiom, the futurist poet, editor, cultural critic, and choreographer Valentin Parnakh, jazz also was, above all, dance music, “a vehicle for the fox trot and shimmy,” (Starr 1983:44) one-step, two-step, Spanish paso doble, and Scottish rag-time (Parnakh 2000:149). Parnakh was likely the first to introduce the word джаз (*jazz*) to the Russian language, and see in that music the “interweaving of world cultures, the combination of modern eccentricity, machinery, and biomechanics, with the ancient idea of musical communication between peoples” (Batashev 2007). In *Soviet Jazz*, published in 1972, Alexey Batashev writes that in 1922, after the end of the Russian Civil War, Valentin Parnakh returned to Russia from France, where he had been elected as a chair of the Paris Chamber of Poets, a group of literary Russian emigres (8). He published several articles on the artistic and aesthetic development of music and the performing arts in the 1920s in Europe and Russia, introducing the phenomenon of jazz and a series of new dances to the Soviet audience. One such article, “Jazz Band,” was first published in 1922 in the Berlin journal *Veshch’ (Thing)*, an avant-garde Russian émigré publication.⁴ The term was translated as “tumult orchestra” (Batashev 1972:9). Parnakh first heard Louis Mitchell’s Jazz Kings in Paris in July 1921 at the Trocadero nightclub, and, like those around him, “was mesmerized by the playful antics of the black musicians...” (Gordon 1996:424; Batashev 1972:8-9). The innovative music and dance generated within its ‘syncopated entrails’ became the primary theme of a number of Parnakh’s early poems, distinguished by the rhythms of deliberately redundant sentences, “plosive vividness, metaphorical buffoonery, phonetic asperity, conversational syntax, and free versification.” (Arenzon 2000:14)

Banjo chatter, saxophone jams.
 Convulsions. Karamba!
 Insatiable jazz-bands
 Strike the cymbals incandescing
 Ardour.
 ...
 Unyoking!
 A Negro jovial and queer
 disgorged the sounding spasms all of a sudden,
 languishing with novel blissful quiver... (Parnakh 2000:53)

⁴ Starr also believes that Parnakh published this article before leaving for Russia (Starr 1983:44).

Proclaiming himself “the inventor of stanzas and dances,” Parnakh poeticized the universality of expressive culture’s ancient meanings, and paid tribute to syncopate that, according to the author, was featured not only in jazz, but also in ancient languages, such as Sanskrit and Hebrew. He alluded to the eccentricity of modern dance steps, pointing to the “grotesque trot of two entwined persons who are speeding up, abruptly pulsating with machine-like regularity, keeping time broken down by syncopated beat,” that he thought was the only tempo capable of obscuring fears, and satisfying desires of postwar dancers (Parnakh 2000:149). Parnakh referred to certain elements of those dance steps and music as originating in “ancient polyrhythmic and acoustic traditions of American Negroes and Indians.”⁵ However, he refused to label syncopated rhythms, musical lamentations and entreaties, mastery of improvisation, or responsorial, as folklore idioms that accommodate ethnic and social identities curtailed by time and space. He argued that those features have always existed as archetypal universal and humanistic artistic forms historically and socially making transitions from one cultural milieu to another (Parnakh 1932:73).⁶ Thus, rather than being “representative of racial stereotypes,” they have become unifying “protean, flexible, and cognizant mechanisms of cultural expression” with distinct diverse peculiarities folded into them (Krasner 1996:73).

Unlike other early interpreters of jazz, Parnakh learned, in the words of cultural historian Lawrence Levine, to be “comfortable” with the fact that “a significant part of our heritage derived from Africa and other non-European sources” and that it is not an “embarrassing weakness but a dynamic source of strength” (1989:8). Parnakh elaborated by studying non-European artistic forms first in Russia, where he explored Germanic and Slavic influences, and the consequences of ghetto culture in the transformation of the ancient Hebrew tradition of performing arts.⁷ Later, he revealed another element of diverse cultural

⁵ Lawrence Levine considers this fact to be one of the reasons why jazz, while being an integral part of American culture, has experienced “a long-standing neglect by historians and their colleagues in many other disciplines” in this country. Levine argues that, unlike early interpreters and critics of jazz elsewhere, scholars in the United States had to overcome “the values and predispositions of the larger society” in order to express their enthusiasm about jazz music. Levine concludes that it has happened only recently and resulted in “the increasing scholarly interest in jazz” (1989:6). Among those, who, according to Levine, distinguished the value of non-European elements such as African American ‘melodies’ or some idioms of Native Americans’ culture back at the end of the 19th century were Czech composer, Antonin Dvorak (*New World Symphony*) who lived and worked in the United States for many years, and Edward McDowell (*Indian Suite*) (1989:9, 10).

⁶ In this interpretation of syncopated music and jazz dances Parnakh seems to be prophetic foreseeing the ideas of such a cultural critic as Lawrence W. Levine who, though writing on a different continent some forty years later, also considers universality and archaism of jazz elements stating that similar to the word ‘culture’ as it was understood at the turn of the 20th century in the United States when “a music or musics that came to be known as jazz appeared,” the word jazz was not necessarily new. It was, paraphrasing Levine, an old word with new meaning. Another writer of our times David Krasner also seems to agree with Parnakh and Levine stressing its universality and discovering in what has become known as jazz dances culturally expressive forms used as a cross-over commodity and transgression of the racial divide.

⁷ Parnakh documented his analysis in an article entitled “Gabima and Hebrew Theatre” published in *Europe* in Paris in 1926. The author explores the possibilities of the resurrection of

influences by collecting and translating poetic works of Jewish authors who were victimized and executed in Spain and Portugal by the Catholic inquisition and whose contributions to Romance philology had been unjustly underestimated or ignored. When a collection of Parnakh's poems was released in 1922, reviewers referred to him as an "ideal anti-romantic that embodied the essence of Latino-Mauritanian culture" (quoted in Arenzon 2000:25). Thus, comparing the non-European rhythmic movement patterns of modern dances⁸ with syncopation in jazz, the element that he thought approximated them to an immemorial antiquity of Africa and the Orient (Parnakh 2000:160), Parnakh continued to emphasize the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of various world cultures. He concluded that while featuring an exchange of extreme movements, as well as static and dynamic elements, jazz dance and music that had caused such a sensation in the Old World, were powered with emotional charge, and set in motion between various means of expression.⁹ In "Advice to the Public,"¹⁰ one of his early poems, Parnakh warns "Do not hold up to shame modern dance like / the Pope does.../ It's time now to learn to syncopate/scratch and scramble along, shy aside..." (2000:74, 75).

This point of view differs from other early efforts to define "the old-new" elements of syncopated music in other parts of the world. For example, Levine refers to an article from *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, "Jass and Jassism," published in 1918, only a year earlier than the first series of Parnakh's jazz poems and critical essays. The piece reflected an atmosphere of "rapidly accelerating cultural hierarchy" (Levine 1989: 11) in the United States and characterized "jazz music" as a "manifestation of a low streak in man's tastes that has not yet come

Hebrew theatre, acknowledging the importance of preserving Jewish traditions in the centers of Russian orthodoxy. It is interesting that Parnakh was infatuated with and advocated for both the Hebrew language that he would like to hear from the professional stage and jazz that he introduced in "highbrow" theatres. Later on though both Hebrew and jazz were under attack—Hebrew as a "bourgeois" language (Parnakh 2000:197), used mostly during religious rituals (as opposed to Yiddish which was considered the language of the masses), and jazz as the music of the capitalist colonial West. At the end of the 1940s, when Stalin deployed his anti-Semitic campaign known as the assault on "rootless cosmopolitans" the Jewish tradition would again be under attack as well as any pro-Western cultural idioms such as jazz. The latter was denounced as part of rootless formalism which included "the entire high-culture tradition in the twentieth century music" (Starr 1983:220).

⁸ For example, Badger describes the development and the popularity of such dances as one-step and fox trot and concludes that they were "understood from the very beginning as African American in origin." In his book he quotes from the article "Negro Composer on Race's music: Jesse Rees Europe Credits Men of His Blood with Introducing Modern Dances," in the *New York Tribune*, November 26, 1914, and reprinted in the *New York Age*, November 26, 1914 (quoted in Badger 1995: 281).

⁹ It is interesting that some early instructions of how to dance fox-trot with very clear literary description of the steps, rhythms, and movements echoes Parnakh's excitement with the dance that he refers to with such figurativeness. See for example Vernon Castle's instructions in *Ladies Home Journal*, 31 January, 1914: "... two slow steps (a glide, stride, or drag) followed by four quick ones (hop, kick, and stop) ..." (Castle 1914: 24). Badger noticed that this article can be seen as "yet another indication of the Castle's victory in the battle to gain respectability for social dancing" that was denounced by Edward Bok, the reserved editor of *Ladies Home Journal*, who had formerly been among the opponents of such dancing (1995:115).

¹⁰ The poem is alluded to in Dadaist manifesto "To the Public" by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes.

out in civilization's wash" (Jass and Jassism, 1918). The article suggested that there was this "great assembly hall of melody," "inner sanctuaries of harmony," and below them all, "down in the basement, a kind of servant's hall of rhythm:"

It is there we hear the hum of the Indian dance, the throb of the Oriental tambourines and kettledrums, the clatter of the clogs, the click of Slavic heels, the thumpty-tumpty of the negro banjo, and, in fact, the native dances of the world ("Jass and Jassism," 1918).

Unlike Parnakh, who thought that such universal means of expression as rhythm, movements, various imitative sound effects, etc., "explore and convey dramatization of life itself and reconstruct the wholeness of existence" (Arenzon 2000:14), *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* article warned its readers about such "atrociousness in polite society" as ragtime or jazz, whose "musical value is nil," but "possibilities of harm are great," and concluded that it should be "a point of civic honor to suppress it" ("Jass and Jassism," 1918).¹¹ Parnakh, in turn, rejected "adjectival boxes and categories" (Levine 1989:7) created in such publications, and wrote that differentiation in the arts does not help to recognize the close correspondence between ancient elements of artistic forms such as theatre, poetry, music, dance, and painting (2000:155). One element common to music, language, and movement was, according to Parnakh, syncopation (2000:156). Transfigured by modernity, ancient syncopation and its related forms in language, versification, music, dance, and theatrical art were bursting into the twentieth century (Ibid.:201).

The poet was immediately welcomed into the very 'epicenter' of the artistic circles of Moscow, including a group of poets known as "Moscow Parnassus," and published innovative and provocative articles, while touring with lectures about modern dance and jazz music. In 1922, Parnakh organized the first jazz band in Russia. His orchestra performed on various stages, including the podium of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, where the delegates "had shown scant interest in the racial problem in America" and had adopted its famous "Negro Thesis," calling on black Americans "to take up the cause of revolution and spread it back to Africa" (Starr 1983:101). Parnakh's repertoire varied from hits like "Kitten on the Keys" by Zez Confrey to sophisticated modernist experiments such as Milhaud's ballet suite "Le Boeuf sur le Toit."¹² Parnakh staged the first lecture-performance in the newly established Institute of Theatre. During the show, he not only spoke about jazz orchestras he had heard abroad, but also exhibited musical instruments, demonstrated the ways they were used by jazz musicians, and danced ragtime,

¹¹ Many African American performers and social critics also saw "potential harm" in performing certain dances and music, warning that they were becoming more and more "a fad among some colored people, encouraged by the whites," and denouncing them as being beneath "the dignity of the better class of 'the race'" (*The Indianapolis Freeman*, 1898: 4).

¹² Later Parnakh initiated a serious comprehensive and professional analysis of the aesthetic potential of jazz in the music of the French composer. His thoughts were published in the article "Innovative Ideas in Music" published in the Russian *Zhizn' Iskusstva* in 1925.

shimmy, and, most importantly, the fox trot, combining the steps with pantomime and grotesque robotic movements.¹³ The show was so successful that it was soon repeated at the House of the Press, the gathering place of Moscow's artistic bon monde. There he encountered his former acting teacher, theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was soon incorporating jazz into his plays. (Arenzon 2000: 5-14; Starr, 1983: 43-53, Batashev 1972:11). Parnakh's interpretations of fox trots on Meyerhold's stage soon inspired the young composer Shostakovich to create his famous orchestration of one of the tunes.

Between cultural milieux: the integration of music and drama

"The tempo and brassiness" of American popular music had great appeal for Meyerhold and he "employed it not only for mood and intermission entertainment, but also involved it directly in the production" (Symons 1971: 132). Already in his early works, the director expressed one of his most basic concerns as a theatricalist: "the integration of music and drama" (Symons 1971:132). Later, Meyerhold reconsidered the constrained arsenal of traditional means of expression, striving for the integration of language, gesture, musical themes, and rhythms.¹⁴ He introduced a jazz band to accompany the Chechotka (a kind of tap dance) in his production of Fernard Crommelynck's *Le Cocu Magnifique* in April, 1922 (Law 1971:70, Starr 1983:50). Law writes that when the production opened that spring, the music was played on a piano. However, that autumn Meyerhold introduced a jazz band that accompanied dances on stage and entertained audiences during intermission (70). Although Law does not mention who was playing, others noted that it was a jazz band led by Valentin Parnakh, who returned to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1922.

A year later, Meyerhold caricatured modern decadents, featuring American popular music in his production of *Lake Lyul*, written by Alexey Faiko. But the real transformation of a political review into a musical and dance revue appeared in the play *D. E. (Give Us Europe!)*, 1924), based on Ilya Ehrenburg's science fantasy novel, *Trest D. E.* and Bernard Kellerman's *The Tunnels*, and touched upon novels by Pierre Hamp and Upton Sinclair. Ehrenburg himself acknowledged that

¹³ As Arenzon argues in the commentaries to Parnakh's works, the performance was influenced by "the surprise strategy" of Jean Cocteau who staged his famous grotesque pantomimes, one of which "Le Boeuf sur le Toit" was later transformed in Darius Milhaud's surreal ballet.

¹⁴ Symons believes that music and musical concepts played a much larger part in the Meyerhold theories and methods than is generally acknowledged (Symons 1971:158). And yet, Symons does not mention Parnakh, who was in charge for music accompaniments in Meyerhold's theatre for many productions analyzed in his book. Other critics also did not do enough research analyzing musical accompaniment of the play. Thus, Llewellyn Hedgbeth makes a remarkable mistake in his article about "D. E.," when he writes that Meyerhold "asked Sofia Parnok to organize the Soviet Union first jazz band for the performance." Hedgbeth is repeatedly mistaken, as the first jazz band was organized in 1922 not 1924 when "D.E." was staged. It was led by Parnakh and not by his sister, and it was Valentin who directed the choreography. Hedgbeth provides an interesting detail that none of other researchers mention with regard to the performance of the play. According to the author of the article "Meyerhold's D. E." the director invited Sidney Bechet to play during the performance when the jazzman visited Russia with his quintet in 1925. Llewellyn writes: "Meyerhold asked Bechet and his group to perform in D.E.," and for some time the visitors of the Meyerhold theatre were thrilled by the group artistry" (Hedgbeth 1975: 28).

the production was interesting: “Europe perished amidst a great deal of noise, as the panels of the set were hustled off the stage, the actors changed their make-up in a hurry, and a jazz band played deafeningly” (Hedgbeth 1975:25).

The “decaying West” was represented by tangos, shimmies, and fox trots, performed by a jazz band organized and led by Valentin Parnakh. In order to persuade the audience that the music was “*le dernier cri*” of the perishing bourgeois, the program proclaimed that band leader Valentin Parnakh “introduced a number of new dance moves that he had used in Paris, Rome, Seville, and Berlin” (Rudnitski 1969:284). *Zhizn’ iskusstva* reported that “foxtrotting steps were performed masterfully.” The author of the article, Konstantin Miklashevskii, praised Parnakh for “the perfected techniques, remarkable tempo patterns, and finely-drawn rhythm” (Miklashevskii 1924:11). Some critics stressed the bourgeois characteristic of the jazz accompaniment and described the “breathless shimmy” that “had [a] rather doleful impression,” being “the lascivious dance of the decaying civilization” (Rudnitski 1969:284).

Pravda also described Meyerhold’s technique of communicating satirical condemnation of Western decadence and wrote that “music was successfully used for the manifestation of the dramatic action rhythm and for maintaining the persistent pulsation of the performance” (Braudo 1924:7). The newspaper paid special attention to the director’s choice to perform the passage from Darius Milhaud’s ballet *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, referring to it as to “a representative of the most innovative French art of sounds” (Braudo 1924:7, Miklashevskii 1924:11).¹⁵ It reported that the jazz band consisted of a saxophone, xylophone, grand piano, violin, contrabass, snare drum, percussions, and various sound effects devices. The author referred to the ensemble as the best way to musically imitate modern urban uproar when performed alongside “melodically and rhythmically impudent, spicy, and morbid fox trots, the dances of apaches, and other musical scum of the modern city” (Braudo 1924:7).¹⁶

Two years later, that tradition of staging the ongoing ideological conflict between good communists, their sympathizers, and bourgeois philistines (Symons 1971:147) continued in Sergei Tret’yakov’s anti-colonial play *Roar China!* (1926).¹⁷ It was directed by Vasily Fedorov, Meyerhold’s student, who joined the theatre in 1922, as a production assistant. Symons describes Fedorov’s work as an effort “of a devoted disciple working under the supervision of his master” (145). The director divided the cast into two groups: Asians, as colonized people, and the white Europeans, as colonizers. The former were depicted with unprecedented tenderness and fondness. “For working up a Chinese atmosphere, especially in the last acts, he [Fedorov] employed a slow tempo, chanting voices to musical

¹⁵ Miklashevskii also mentions the performance of “*Le Boeuf sur le Toit*” by Darius Milhaud as the appropriate accompaniment of the action taking place in France.

¹⁶ Gordon writes that the show remained in the repertory of Meierhold’s Theatre until 1930, and that it is uncertain how long Parnakh continued to conduct his jazz band for that production (428).

¹⁷ According to Symons, Tret’yakov’s work was highly praised by Bertolt Brecht, who reportedly said in an interview that “in Russia there’s one man who’s working along the right lines, Tret’yakov; a play like *Roar, China!* shows him to have found new means of expressions.” Symons quotes from *Brecht on Theatre*, edited by J. Willet, 65 (Symons 1971:147).

accompaniment concealed in the background, with suffering groans and gestures intensifying the tragic torment of the masses..." (cited in Symons 145). While the Chinese were pictured simply and naturally as vital and human, the imperialists were presented with the spirit of deliberate sharp social grotesqueness, as villains, demoralized by the omnipresent corrupting fox trot.

Not everyone agreed that the satirical portraits of Western "slickers" aroused condemnation of capitalist mores, as "the audience evinced an undue fascination with them and their evil ways" (Symons 1971:108). Symons contended that "the scenes depicting capitalist decadency—sexy dancing girls in black mesh hose and tights moving to a pulsating jazz accompaniment—were more exciting and 'real' than the scenes depicting the good, clean, upright proletarian man" (1971:121).¹⁸ Although the corrupting music and dances were supposed to denounce "the decadent influences of Western bourgeois culture," the audience perceived them as "a playful, public expression to post-revolutionary concepts of "sexual liberation," "free love," and the demise of 'bourgeois' marriage" (Gorsuch 1994:8-9).

Such a development was quite distinct from the situation in America, where cross-over into "authentic" and "exotic" cultural idioms were not supposed to violate social taboos and dancers had to find "acceptable ways to transgress racial boundaries" and "to balance sexuality" against the risk of alienating the reputable public (Krasner 1996:81, 82). While in the United States, the cultural advancement of jazz dance was transformed into a "social grace," "stylish manners," and "modern gestures" with offensive "extravagances" being eschewed, "expressions of sexuality" omitted, and "coquetry" removed (Krasner 1996:81), in Russia, where the "cakewalk and fox trot were both swept immediately into middle-class urban life," people "seemed to wish the music to have an even more erotic and disreputable background than it had" (Starr 1983:34).

The response prefigured "the revolution of taste that would set the stage for a new art" (Segel 1987: xvii). Cultural hierarchies in Russia were becoming less evident, as the "high" and "low" arts merged. As a result, jazz fit neither 'high culture' nor folk heritage, having created its own cultural and social space within deep-rooted folk music, rich symphonic and classical musical traditions, operatic tunes, and the newest communication technologies (Jackson 2003: 46-51, Starr 1983: 24).¹⁹

A rhythmical renaissance and the revolution of taste

Many musicians, for their part, confessed that jazz represented a "rhythmic renaissance." Some referred to fox trot as music that is "free of the strict phrase or sentence," and can be improvised "without violating any earlier musical

¹⁸ Critics mentioned a similar tendency analyzing, for example, "Trust D. E." performance (Hedgbeth 1975:35).

¹⁹ There are other views on such a successful and effective merging of jazz and European cultural idioms. According to David Krasner, in "Rewriting the Body: Aida Overton Walker and the Social Formation of Cakewalking," jazz and modern dance choreography did not necessarily merge with other cultural forms in Europe, rather they were taken over, or shaped by preconceptions that Europeans imposed on them (Krasner 1996: 67).

law” (Danzi 1986: 47). Others included syncopated music and dance tunes in their compositions. Jazz elements were adopted by classically-trained maestros, to be orchestrated and performed in the sanctuary of Euterpe. The keepers of Russia’s musical heritage, as well as their many European counterparts, showed a remarkable openness to jazz. Among them was Nikolai Malko, the principal conductor and director of the Leningrad Philharmonic, with an international reputation, who believed that “jazz would open up new areas of musical timbre for composers of the future” (1923:5). Rising star Dmitri Shostakovich was another musician moved by the “fox trot craze.”

It was Nikolai Malko who gave the first performance of Shostakovich’s graduation composition, his youthful *Symphony No. 1*, which hurtled the composer to instant fame.²⁰ It was the same Nikolai Malko who encouraged Shostakovich not to be a “music snob,”²¹ and to enjoy various styles and genres, given that the atmosphere of the musical life of Leningrad at the time encouraged the suggestion.

Sofia Moshevich describes that environment as rich and varied. She writes that besides a classic Western and Russian repertoire, concert programs also featured the French group Les Six, Ernst Krenek, and Stravinsky (Moshevich 2004:15). Other authors also point to a “novelty-starved” audience and numerous guest artists who visited the Soviet capitals in the course of the ‘New Economic Policy’ period of the 1920’s (Schwartz 1972:44). Boris Schwartz, for example, noticed that “the peculiar responsiveness of “the Russian audience” as well as “the musical curiosity of young Russian professionals” struck “a responsive chord among the foreign visitors who returned home, deeply impressed” (1072:44).

Alla Bogdanova mentions Shostakovich’s interest in multiple genres that characterized his early works and reflected upon some common developments in opera elsewhere. Thus, Bogdanova notes operas by Krenek and Gershwin performed in Leningrad at that time (1979:90). Shostakovich admitted that “during my years of study at the conservatory, I heard as much music [of all possible genres] as I did in all the following years put together. I’m strongly persuaded that this was of great benefit to me” (quoted in Moshevich 2004:47).

The composer referred to the excitement brought to the Russian musical stage by Oscar Fried, Otto Klemperer and other orchestral conductors of the Austro-German school, by pianists Egon Petri and Eduard Erdman, who explored modernism, and by the violinist Joseph Szigeti, whose “intense, angular style,

²⁰ Sophia Moshevich refers to Shostakovich’s *Symphony No. 1* as “an accomplished artistic masterpiece in which only the captivating vitality and exuberant temperament betray composer’s youth.” She writes that when Nikolai Malko, the chief conductor of the Leningrad Philharmonic, heard the piece, he was impressed both by the new composition and Shostakovich’s playing the piano. On the 12 May 1926, the *Symphony No. 1* was premiered by Nikolai Malko conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra. This date is considered a turning point in Shostakovich’s career. The *Symphony* “acquainted the world with a new musical genius and was destined to bring Shostakovich international recognition and fame” (Moshevich 2004:39-41).

²¹ The author borrowed that phrase from Levine’s article “Jazz and American Culture” where he quotes the bandmaster John Philip Sousa, who complained of the “artistic snobbery” that has plagued his career: “Notwithstanding the credo of musical snobs, ‘popular’ does not necessarily mean ‘vulgar’ or ‘ephemeral’” (quoted in Levine 1989:10).

so different from the polished Russian tradition of violin playing, captured the interest of professionals and laymen alike” (Schwartz 1972:44).

Shostakovich also pointed to his creative collaboration with composer Bruno Walter, who promised to introduce *Symphony No. 1* to Berlin, the French composers Darius Milhaud,²² who was the most outspoken advocate of jazz in the group, Les Six, foreseeing jazz becoming a “classical” form of music, and Jean Wiéner, who played jazz piano along with the African American saxophonist and banjoist Vance Lowry (Schwartz 1972:45, Jackson 2003:119). Schwartz mentions Shostakovich as one of those Russian pianists who much-admired Jean Wiéner’s “subtle syncopations” (1972:45).

With his voracious musical curiosity, Shostakovich began to frequent concerts of visiting jazz musicians. According to Elizabeth Wilson, who wrote the introduction to his *Jazz Album*, the composer “reported his delight at a jazz band that accompanied a ‘negro operetta’”²³ in 1926 (1988:3). The predominance of imported films made movie theatres “ideal conduits for popular songs from abroad” (Starr 1983:27). As a student, the composer tried his hand at American ragtime or jazz “toiling before the flickering screen” (Starr 1983:17). In spite of the fact that it was primarily his financial situation that forced the composer to seek employment as a pianist-improviser, his cinema improvisations were, by all accounts, “markedly different from the-standard fare of musical clichés” (Mosheovich 2004: 37). The cinema employment was apparently “draining Dmitri’s time, health, and energy,” but it proved his “sensitivity to everything new and unusual.” Among his friends, he would often play jazz improvisations on the piano (Volkov 1978, Dmitri Shostakovich: 225). Within a few years, the composer was making a conscious attempt to write in modernist idioms. Mosheovich mentions Shostakovich’s *Piano Sonata No. 1, op. 12* that he completed in October, 1926. The author explains that it was the first large piano work in which the composer expressed himself “without limitations and tried his hand at a number of many ‘forbidden’ styles and techniques” (Mosheovich 2004:43). Jazz critic Kevin Whitehead points to its “ragtimey exuberance,” and “long descending glisses” early on in the *Sonata*.²⁴ But the composer’s infatuation with ‘syncopated music’ has not been widely publicized in his native land. Rather, Russians would know and love Shostakovich for his stern, pathétique, preemptory compositions that reflect the tragic history of the country, looming ideology-driven dictatorial authority, and unending sufferings of its people.

Musicologists in the West, however, have repeatedly referred to Shostakovich’s interest in jazz. Frederick Starr briefly refers to the composer’s

²² Shostakovich performed his First Symphony for friends, teachers, and musicians. Darius Milhaud heard it, not long after the premiere, in March 1926, and Bruno Walter—in 1927. The symphony was premiered abroad by Bruno Walter on 6 February 1928 in Berlin and by Leopold Stokowski on 2 November 1928 in Philadelphia.

²³ Wilson mistakenly writes 1925. According to all other accounts, ‘negro operetta’ and the accompanying Sam Wooding’s band “Chocolate Kiddies” toured Moscow and Leningrad in 1926, not 1925. See for example (Kotlyarski 1990:5) or (Starr 1983:54-57).

²⁴ It does not persuade Whitehead that these were proof of jazz influence. Kevin Whitehead has shared with me his thoughts about Shostakovich’s *Piano Sonata No. 1*.

experience with jazz and ragtime and mentions his orchestration of “Tea for Two” (1983:59). Sofia Mosheovich, who devoted a book to Shostakovich’s brilliant career as a pianist, also points to the fact that he incorporated the fox trot into a ballet score, and writes that it caused the piece to disappear from the composer’s repertoire for several decades (2004:188n71). Scholar Laurel Fay mentions the “celebrity” of the composer’s “hasty arrangement,” writing about Shostakovich’s ability to “conceptualize a work in its entirety, and produce his music quickly as the inspiration struck him” (2000:46). But only Solomon Volkov, the most controversial of the scholars writing about the composer’s life and creative activity, the author of the (in)famous *Testimony*,²⁵ and *Shostakovich and Stalin*, shed light on the story behind the composer’s orchestration of a famous fox trot and discussed the musician’s internal struggle borne of caution and fear, bred within the police state atmosphere of Soviet life.²⁶ In a 1978 *Musical Quarterly* article entitled “Dmitri Shostakovich and ‘Tea for Two,’” Volkov undertakes a revelation of the story behind the composer’s transcription of the fox trot, a composition that has achieved perennial success and has been picked up by famous musicians from all over the world.

“Tahiti Trot”: The many lives of “Tea for Two”

Vincent Youmans authored that “gaily syncopated score” in 1925 for *No, No, Nanette!*—a quintessential 1920s musical comedy with its “giddy procession of flappers, philanderers and farcical situations.”²⁷ When producer Harry Frazee gave Youmans and co-lyricist Irving Caesar only twenty-four hours to come up with something new and fresh, they responded by writing two songs that became the show’s greatest hits, “I Want to be Happy,” and “Tea for Two” (Bowers 1989:17). The latter very quickly became “the standard soft-shoe shuffle of the world,”²⁸ making the musical itself an international hit several months prior to the Broadway performance. *American Popular Song* author Alec Wilder attributed the popularity to “the device of building up to a *b* natural in the melody, then to a *b* flat, then back to a *b* natural and then again to a *b* flat” (1990:132).²⁹

²⁵ The book caused a lot of resonance in the press and in numerous publications in the fields of music and Russian studies. Thus, for example, Laurel Fay obtained the reputation of Volkov’s most authoritative and inexorable critic for the article “Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose *Testimony*?” published in *Russian Review* in the fall 1980, and for “Volkov’s *Testimony* Reconsidered,” published as a second chapter in *A Shostakovich Casebook*. The author defines two major concerns that were expressed both in the Soviet Union and in the West. One is the authenticity of the manuscript that Volkov used for the *Testimony*, and the other—“veracity of many statements contained therein” (Fay 2004: 12).

²⁶ See Volkov, 1978. Dmitri Shostakovich and ‘Tea for Two’ in *Musical Quarterly* 64:2 (April, 1978): 223-28, and the article by the same author “D. D. Shostakovich i Mal’ko” in *Slavica Hierosolymitana* Vol. III (1978): 264-271.

²⁷ The premiere took place on 16 September 1925, in the Globe Theatre; the musical run was 321 performances (Bowers 1989: 17).

²⁸ The text is on the sleeve of the audio recording, produced by Columbia, 1971. This is the recording of the forty-six-year-old musical revived on Broadway in 1971.

²⁹ Due to the seemingly everlasting success of its two biggest hits, the show remains enshrined as one of the classic comedies of the 1920s. It received “a surprisingly stylish

“Tea for Two” reached Russia and was swept into theatrical performances where Shostakovich heard it. In 1926, it was incorporated in the operetta “The Career of Pierpont Blake” by Boris Fomin (1900-1948), with Russian lyrics by Konstantin Podrevsky (1888-1930), who gave it the title “Tahiti Trot.” The tune’s name emphasized its fox trot elements and reflected the tendency at the time to delve into the world of exotic and “blatantly lascivious” modern dance. Starr explains that even though Russia’s nascent popular music industry was introducing “a well-structured written music,” that same industry fostered an image of “uninhibited savages wailing erotic melodies under a tropical moon” when it promoted the new “Negro” dances. According to Volkov, the fox trot also resounded at the same time from the stage of Meyerhold’s theatre, the composer’s favorite, in *Roar China!* Volkov writes that Shostakovich orchestrated “Tea for Two” from memory and did so in forty-five minutes, “in a wager with Nikolai Malko” (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978:224). The conductor himself recalls that “Shostakovich played the fox trot very often and very well on the piano and that he was willing to orchestrate the piece at his [conductor’s] request,” which he did in October, 1927 (Malko 1930:39).³⁰

Analyzing Shostakovich’s orchestration, Kevin Whitehead noted certain featured peculiarities that included “repeated performance of the introductory verse,” a move which “would very rarely be done by an American arranger.” Also, though sections are repeated, “the composer offers a fresh arrangement on every pass, and like other jazzy pop compositions, it’s quite flowing, rhythmically.” Whitehead thinks that it is comparable with what American counterpart Paul Whiteman was doing in the same period.³¹

Soon after, the “brilliantly witty and original” orchestration was performed at a symphony in Moscow, and later in Leningrad and other cities.³² “Tahiti Trot” acquired such popularity in Russia that, along with concert hall venues, it was played by dance bands in restaurants and dance halls all over the country.³³ Later, in 1930, on recommendation of conductor Alexander Gauk, it became a part of

and successful” Broadway revival in 1971. A Film version of the musical was released early in 1930, then in 1940, and a third time in 1950. In the 1940 remake Youmans’ popular score was replaced by songs written by other composers and reduced to just “Tea for Two” and “I want to be Happy.” In 1950 Doris Day and Gordon MacRae starred in Warner’s “Tea for Two,” which, though omitting the original story entirely, used several Youmans’ songs from “Nanette” and other shows.

³⁰ The conductor refers to the inscription on the score made by Shostakovich that was dated October 1927.

³¹ Kevin Whitehead, personal communication. 2007, Lawrence, KS.

³² Among other places where Malko conducted this orchestration he mentions Kharkiv, Baku, and London (Malko 1930:39). Laurel Fay writes that Malko was so pleased with the orchestration that after giving the premiere at the same Moscow concert in November 1928 with the suite from the *Nose* and another trifle, the transcription for winds of *Two Pieces by Scarlatti*, he included the orchestration in numerous concerts (Fay 2000:47).

³³ In his open letter to the editor, the conductor writes that “in the summer of 1929 the orchestration was so popular that it was performed almost every other day in Kiev in ‘Proletarski’ park” (Malko 1930:39).

the composer's first ballet, *The Golden Age*.³⁴ The original libretto was dedicated to the theme of "Russians in the West." It involved the story of Soviet athletes in a capitalist country where an evil Western beauty does her best to seduce the virtuous captain of the Soviet soccer team.

"Tahiti Trot" was so enormously successful that it survived beyond April 18th, 1928, the decisive moment in the politicization of jazz in the USSR. On that day, *Pravda*, the principal organ of the Communist Party, published an essay by novelist Maxim Gorky entitled "On the Music of the Gross." The essay was translated into English by Marie Budberg and first appeared under the title, "The Music of the Degenerate" in the journal *Dial*, that December. It became the "gospel," in Starr's words, of the assault against jazz. Phrases from Gorky's critique appeared in the Soviet press over the following half-century, "whenever it was necessary to settle scores" with the genre, or "simply to contrast the Soviet Union with the degenerate West" (Starr 1983:89). Almost every jazz historian refers to that essay, as illustrating how "a type-cast proletarian from the land of the tsars would feed Soviet xenophobia" (Starr 1983: 89). This is how Gorky describes his perception of jazz in the most widely cited passage:

In the deep stillness resounds the dry knocking of an idiotic hammer. One, two, three, ten, twenty strokes, and after them, like a mud ball splashing into clear water, a wild whistle screeches; and then there are rumblings, wails and howls like the smarting of a metal pig, the shriek of a donkey, or the amorous croaking of a monstrous frog. This insulting chaos of insanity pulses to a throbbing rhythm. Listening for a few minutes to these wails, one involuntarily imagines an orchestra of sexually driven madmen conducted by a man-stallion brandishing a huge genital member."³⁵

In June, 1929, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party convened a conference on music, at which the "fox trot problem" was singled out for a discussion that resulted in a national campaign against jazz dance and syncopated tunes. The Association of Proletariat Musicians, serving as a semi-official censorship body, defined jazz as "the dominant religion, manipulated by the new capitalist masters in order to secure and extend their dominion" (Starr 1983: 93). As Volkov explains, "the fox-trotting West" was pictured as the embodiment of evil and a threat to culture; and a press campaign was begun against "fox-trotism" (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978:225). The first accusations were made against Meyerhold's productions, which were condemned in *Proletarski Musykant (Proletarian Musician)* as being a tribune for propagating distasteful and indecent dances

³⁴ Volkov researched Shostakovich correspondence with the conductor Nikolai Malko and found out that the original tentative title of the Ballet was "Dynamiaida" (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978: 227).

³⁵ Starr quoted the authorized translation by Marie Budberg published in *Dial*, Dec. (1928): 480-84. (1983: 89-90).

and pernicious jazz such as the (in)famous “Tahiti Trot” and other popular tunes that resounded from the stage (*Proletarski Musykant* 1930:30). For committed communists, as Gorsuch put it, flappers’ fashion, jazz and popular new dances “violated cultural and political ideals: they signaled a rampant individualism of personal and cultural expression” (Gorsuch 2008:186).

Llewellyn H. Hedgbeth writes that there were problems for Meyerhold when “audiences found the depiction of the Communist world deadly boring in its opposition to the glittering, sinful pleasures of the West.” The press condemned the fact that “the pictorial descriptions of the achievements of the October Revolution had disappeared and were instead expressed in the picture of a Communist world that was unpleasant because of its grayness and sameness.” Hedgbeth points out that Meyerhold “was accused of ‘urbanism’ and of being fascinated with life in a bourgeois city” (Hedgbeth 1975:35).

In a 1929 attempt to discredit musical innovations from abroad, *Proletarski Musykant* published a slashing article about Krenek’s jazz opera, that only recently had been performed to adulation in Leningrad.³⁶ The author wrote that the band, fox-trot rhythms and intonations turn the lyricism of the drama into a banal story, while moments touched with eroticism became openly pornographic. He called fox trot a dance of the petty bourgeois and suggested that “our working-class audience deserves better than observing vulgar scenes of fox-trotting philistines” (Kaltat 1929:27).³⁷

“Foxtrot at Europe’s Rescue” expressed bitter regrets about Europe’s inability to secure its cultural venues from being taken over by that new American dance. It blamed the First World War for the inexplicable moral and physical exhaustion of Europeans and proclaimed that unfortunately there was no other way in the West to rescue the troubled Old World but to dance while its restrictive cultural heritage collapsed (Kaltat 1929:25).

People’s Commissar of Education (Public Enlightenment) Anatoly Lunacharsky accused the fox trot of embodying “suppressed eroticism and the desire to deaden feeling through drugs” (cited in Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978:225).³⁸ He challenged “syncopated music” and declared that the construction

³⁶ In his first jazz opera Krenek demonstrated his appreciation of the potential for jazz to “rejuvenate” classical music. The composer used instrumentation, that had “the flavor of jazz” in Shimmy, Ivonne’s and Jonny’s duet, incorporated so called “blues notes” and syncopated rhythms in such numbers as the blues song ‘Leb wohl, mein Schatz,’ that was later recorded separately in various arrangements. He also orchestrated catchy and jazzy hit from Youmans’s musical “I Want to Be Happy,” that, together with myriads of other popular compositions, was brought to Germany on records, published as sheet music, and in repertoires of the scores of touring Americans who continued to delight European public well into thirties.

³⁷ Starr documents in his book that the show of Krenek’s opera was closed in Moscow (1983:85). Interestingly, in the USA, things were no better. At the first performance in New York in January 1929, the singer taking the part of Jonny had to be clearly recognizable as a white man wearing black make-up. The opera was a flop there, as it had been in Paris before that. (Jonny Spielt Auf: Between Jazz and New Music 1993:29).

³⁸ Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky, “A Stenographic Report of Lunacharsky’s Speech,” quoted in Volkov, “Dmitri Shostakovich”, 225. Lunacharsky’s interpretation echoes an earlier assessment made by W.E.B. DuBois who saw another dance of African origin, such as cakewalk as though

of socialism in the Soviet Union had its own “vast rhythm of human movement, which in the end, comes together in a single enormous symphony of motion and labor” (Lunacharsky 1929:19). Lunacharsky and Gorky linked jazz not only with dancing but also with “degradation of sexual mores.” Frederic Starr explains that by their criticism of the sexuality of the dance and accompanying music, both Lunacharsky and Gorky condemned jazz as “the instrument of a deliberate capitalist plot” (Starr 1983:92) to make man live “through his sexual organs, so that during the intervals between work he will be preoccupied with these sides of his existence” (quoted in Starr 1983:92-93).

From that time, the syncopated music that contradicted the cultural dogmatism and gloomy Puritanism of Soviet social reality was defined as “a tool of the capitalists to control the true forces of liberation and class struggle” (Starr 1983:93). Yet, while the fox trot was identified by officials as a frontal assault on Soviet culture, it continued to find a responsive urban audience. Starr and Gorsuch explore “the multiple meanings” of jazz, both for the public and for Soviet authorities who struggled with the personal and political influences of jazz, while facing the challenge of “creating cultural hegemony” (Gorsuch 1994:19). Despite official ideology which presented the music as an accompaniment to philistine amorality and apolitical debauchery, it had a profound effect on a new generation of the Soviet urban population. That tendency was notably depicted in Mayakovsky’s play *Bedbug*, staged by Meyerhold and featuring the music of Shostakovich. The prototype for both Bayan and Pierre Skrypkin in the dance class scene was undoubtedly Parnakh, and the principal dance—the fox trot. Lampooning fox-trotting couples in his play, the poet dubbed them “four-legged hermaphrodites.”

In fact, Bolshevik moralists “had much in common with their European and American counterparts” (Gorsuch 1994:19). Gorsuch, whose research is devoted to the analysis of youth culture in Soviet Russia, argues that in the West there was also concern about the “decadent” behavior of youth centered around dangerously polluted “alien” music (Gorsuch 1994:20). The condemnation of jazz on both sides of the Atlantic sounded strikingly similar. Gorsuch refers to a 1921 issue of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, where jazz was described as “the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds” (Gorsuch 1994:19).³⁹

The tendency to blame jazz for “sexual excesses” was also reflected in writing all over Europe. Richard Maltby cited such discourses in *Dreams for Sale: Popular Culture in the 20th Century*. “Jazz-savage, primitive, rotted moral

“innocent amusement,” but often accompanied by “much drinking and attended by white and black prostitutes” (quoted in Krasner 1996:74). Krasner refers to W.E.B. Dubois. 1899. *The Philadelphia Negro*. New York: Benjamin Blom, 320. The term Great Turn or Great Break came from the title of Stalin’s article “Year of the Great Turn: marking the 12th anniversary of October” (“God velikogo pereloma: k XII godovschine Oktiabria”), published on 7 November 1929 in *Pravda*, № 259.

³⁹ Frederick Starr refers to very similar editions as he describes the great controversy over jazz in the United States. Thus he refers to R. McMahon, “Unspeakable Jazz Must Go!” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Dec. (1921): 115-16; “The Jazz Path of Degradation,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Jan. (1922): 26-71; Jaap Kool, “The Triumph of the Jungle,” *Living Age* Feb. 7, (1925): 338-43.

fiber, spread a whorehouse culture, polluted children, caused illegitimacy and all manner of unspeakable crimes” (Maltby 1989:72). *Proletarski Muzykant* articulated analogous arguments when it suggested that to popularize jazz band music meant to reveal our degrading, unbridled, savage inner selves. Kaltat would condemn Krenek’s infatuation with jazz and write that “African Americans are probably enjoying watching their masters’ disgrace, while the latter are slipping away from the grace of minuet and the lively verve of waltz, being captured by the cynicism of the fox trot and cramped with Charleston convulsions...” (1929:27).

Yet, as is clear from these examples, there were also explicit differences between Soviet officialdom and Western cultural gatekeepers’ perspectives on the baleful menace of jazz. Western writing reveals racist hypocrisy, while Russian proletarian exhortation reflects a prudish Bolshevik neo-Victorian “obsession with regulating the expenditure of sexual energy” (Carleton 2005:75). American and European critics worried more about the “barbarian” characteristics of African American jazz culture, while Bolsheviks, on the contrary, would “attribute much of youth’s “decadent” behavior to the corrupting influences of the lecherous bourgeoisie,” condemning European distortion of African folk authenticity (Gorsuch 1994:20). African American cultural idioms were associated with subtle resistance to the Eurocentric economic, political and social oppression, and denunciation of their ruthless exploitation by pleasure-seeking capitalist scoffers went hand-in-hand with a heightened indictment of racism by Soviet ideologues during the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁴⁰ They called for refinement of jazz from “the tavern mood of vulgar Europe that resorted to Negro cultural extravagancy to revive its [European] seared sensuality...” (Kuz’min 1926). Such rhetoric reflected not only a tendency to capitalize on racism, exposing the glaring contradictions of capitalist societies, but also distinguished Soviets from their Western contemporaries, as in the policy-making process they utilized sociohistorical categories of nationality and class rather than the biological category of race.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For a more nuanced analysis of the role of African American folklore, humor and music in resisting their oppression, as well as the controversy surrounding anti-racist discourse on the one hand and reinforced nationalism used to support Soviet ideology on the other, see Roman, Meredith L. 2012. *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928–1937*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, especially Chapter II.

⁴¹ Roman writes, that Soviet authorities appeared to be ahead of their contemporaries in playing the “race card”, as they denied racial hierarchies as backward, at a time when other leaders celebrated the superiority of “white men’s countries” (Roman 2012:10-11). Other scholars, such as Eric Weitz, point out that in spite of the rejection of the biological category of race, Soviet nationalities politics were essentially racial “without the overt concept and ideology of race”. Weitz explains that in spite of the fact that in official Soviet ideology, the friendship of nations within the Soviet federation had “completely eliminated the racism typical of fascism and of capitalist societies”, traces of racial politics crept into Soviet nationalities policies. As a result, particular populations were endowed with immutable traits that every member of the group possessed and that were passed from one generation to the next. These traits could be “the source of praise and power, as with Russians, or could lead to round-ups, forced deportations, and resettlement”. See Weitz, Eric D. 2002. “Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges.” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 1(Spring):1-29 (3).

Such interpretations point to the frustrations of Soviet authorities and to an ongoing struggle in Russia between the apologists for jazz, for whom it would be imperative to define it as the music of oppressed people “indigenous to the ‘Southern Black Belt,’” and those who denounced it as the music of the degenerate West, warning against its decadent bourgeois influences and intimate connection to the capitalist mode of production (Starr 1983:102).

In the midst of that ideological debate, neither the considerable revisions of the libretto of *The Golden Age*, nor the talented choreography in the Academic (Kirov) Theatre could save Shostakovich’s orchestration of the fox trot from condemnation by the authorities (Moshevich 2004:188). In 1930, *Proletarski Musykant* published a list of responses from prominent cultural figures who followed the journal’s call to fight NEP fashion, and “gypsy-foxtrotting”⁴² bands. The head of the Council of Performing Arts and Literature, F. Kon, proclaimed that “it is necessary to mercilessly extirpate gypsy tunes and fox trot as the products of the most hostile and alienated classes and subclasses.” Henrikh Meigauz, a professor from the Moscow Conservatoire, echoed that sentiment, concluding that “the so called light genre in music is the same as pornography in literature” (1930:22).⁴³ Rector of the Moscow Conservatoire Pshibyshevski warned that the “so called light genre in music is one of the most dangerous and enduring sources of NEP ideology that is so inimical to the working class. All those various gypsy romances and fox trots invariably cloud the worker’s mind with venomous intoxicants demoralizing one’s will even more than alcohol, eliminating class consciousness” (1930:22).

Outrage over the fox trot coincided with the so called “Great Turn” (Velikii perelom), a fundamental re-orientation in all spheres of Soviet life, including its cultural and artistic aspects, proclaimed by Stalin, in 1929.⁴⁴ That radical change in state policy meant the end of NEP and the acceleration of collectivization and industrialization. It also signaled a significant ideological shift that determined the end of NEP-era liberties in many forms of artistic expression. Instead, the concept of socialist realism, first proposed by Stalin, was publicly introduced as the officially preferred and sanctioned artistic style that was to snare all arts, including

⁴² It is worth mentioning the comparison between the popularity of gypsy orchestras and dances among aristocracy and bourgeois in pre-Revolutionary Russia and the popularity of jazz dances among the middle class urban public in the 1920s. Laurel Fay mentions that gypsy music was referred to as “exemplifying the degenerate legacy from the bourgeois past” and that was compared with the fox trot “subsuming jazz and decadent influences from the West.” (Fay 2000:59). Thus, it is not surprising that critics compared the influences of jazz music with the impact of gypsy performances that, as Starr reminds in his book, were “embellished with an aura of Oriental exoticism,” and “combined music, dancing, and sex in about the same proportion as in Storyville” (Starr 1983: 25, 26).

⁴³ Interestingly, Levine also mentions that the condemnation of jazz music in the United States, especially by analogy, had become “a favorite sport.” Levine refers to numerous articles in the *New York Times*, *Harper’s* and other publications from 1920s in which critics insisted that jazz “bore the same relationship to classical music as a limerick did to poetry, or a farmhouse to the cathedral” (Levine 1989:12).

⁴⁴ The term Great Turn or Great Break came from the title of Stalin’s article “Year of the Great Turn: marking the 12th anniversary of October” (“God velikogo pereloma: k XII godovschine Oktiabria”), published on 7 November 1929 in *Pravda*, № 259.

theater and music, to propagate an “easily understood, unambiguous picture of life and human nature coupled with an unflagging optimism” (Bliss Eaton 2002: xviii). Innovative artists, such as Parnakh, Shostakovich and Meyerhold would be labeled as formalists, a term that came to be used in the early 1930s as an official condemnation of avant-garde arts, as well as in independent science and teaching. They would come under attack for their “affronts against Soviet sensibilities” and “reticence [would] become the norm of life” more than ever (ibid., xviii-xix).

Volkov writes that under these circumstances, Shostakovich became unnerved. He sent his own memo to *Proletarski Musykant*, then the influential organ of a group of musical personalities who stood close to the party leadership “and fought against “bourgeois ideology” (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978:225). In his note, Shostakovich readily calls upon all the forces of heaven and earth to assist in “light music’s” total destruction (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978:225). The composer writes: “To combat the “light genre,” the most advanced segment of the musical community must seek the aid of the party, the Young Communist League, the trade unions, radio, the most active elements of club membership, and organizers of musical entertainment” (Shostakovich 1930:25).⁴⁵ Volkov describes the letter as being completely loyal on the surface, but ironic and mocking beneath (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich 1978: 226). The postscript to Shostakovich’s letter reveals more struggle and less irony. “I consider it a political mistake on my part to have granted conductor Malko permission to arrange my orchestration of “Tahiti Trot,” since “Tahiti Trot” (a number from the ballet *The Golden Age*), when performed without an appropriate setting showing the *composer’s attitude toward the material*, might create the erroneous impression that I am an advocate of the ‘light genre’” (Shostakovich 1930:25).

At the time, Malko was on tour in Prague. The conductor did not delay in responding. He observed “quite justly” that Shostakovich’s remark about having “granted conductor Malko permission to arrange my orchestration” was not comprehensible to him. He had been granted permission to perform the piece in 1927, long before the ballet was even a project, and since then the musician had been conducting exactly the same arrangement. Neither had he heard about “the composer’s attitude to the material,” nor about any ban imposed on it (Malko 1930: 39).⁴⁶ *Proletarski Musykant* published the conductor’s letter with the following postscript: “Along with publishing this letter the editors wish to observe that since conductor Malko has more than once in a number of cities performed the fox trot orchestrated by Shostakovich, he is no less responsible than the composer for the propagandizing of this ‘gem’ of light-genre music” (*Proletarski Musykant* 1930:39).⁴⁷

Since then, that early work of Shostakovich had almost been forgotten in Russia. His orchestral transcription had not been performed for more than forty-five years. The ballet *The Golden Age* also quickly disappeared from repertory,

⁴⁵ Shostakovich’s letter was translated by Barry Rubin and cited in Volkov, “Dmitri Shostakovich and ‘Tea for Two’” (Volkov, Dmitri Shostakovich, 1978:226).

⁴⁶ Malko’s response to Shostakovich was also translated by Rubin and cited in Volkov’s article.

⁴⁷ As it is translated by Rubin and cited in Volkov’s article.

and the original score of the orchestration remained in the possession of the conductor's widow, Berthe Malko, in New York.

Meyerhold, Tret'yakov and Parnakh too were silenced and fell victims to Stalin's terror. The poet was consigned to cultural oblivion and died in obscurity in 1951. Until recently, Parnakh's legacy has been almost entirely eliminated from cultural discourse, aside for a few relatively brief references to his creative personality profiled in Starr's and Batashev's books devoted to the history of jazz. Parnakh is absent from the literary encyclopedia *Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopedia* (KLE, 1962-1978), considered one of the most comprehensive reference editions in the field of literary studies in Russia. The family name Parnakh, or Parnok, was associated only with Valentin's sister Sofia, a poetess recalled in the memoirs of Marina Tsvetaeva. Sofia was honored with an entry in the KLE literary reference edition. Even though she devoted a number of her poems to her brother (Parnok 1979:220), their artistic credos were very different. Parnakh's creative work simply "dissolved in the artistic capillary flow of his time" (Arenzon 2000: 19), with the last edition of his poems published in Moscow more than seventy years ago, and lost in its entirety. Only in 2000 was Parnakh's early poetry finally republished in Russia, in an attempt to return his work and cultural legacy to contemporary artistic consciousness.⁴⁸

Even though Shostakovich attempted to detach himself from the fox trot affair, he did not avoid a fate of humiliating disfavor. He became withdrawn, following attacks upon his work, especially in 1936 and again in 1948. When a Communist Party censure of Soviet arts uncovered a "spirit of decadence and bourgeois estheticism" in the music of a number of Soviet composers, the Central Committee ruled that seven of them, including Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, and Sergei Prokofiev, were guilty of creating and encouraging anti-democratic works" (*New York Times*; 1948, "Soviet Artists Find Selves 'Decadent'"). Along with Sergei Prokofiev, Shostakovich accepted the Central Committee's criticism and interpreted the party's rebuke as "fatherly concern for us—the Soviet artists" (*New York Times*. 1948, "Shostakovich Welcomes Party's 'Fatherly Concern'"). As the cold war progressed, perceived Western influences upon Soviet culture were thoroughly filtered. All musical performances were subject to prior censorship. The tiniest hint of hedonism was outlawed. In a world where natural and sincere manifestations of emotion were impossible, "where everything was stifled by 'social necessity,' jazz became a safety valve, an outlet for the realization of individual life, for the manifestation of human privacy." It had clearly been perceived as the music of free self-expression, surrounded with a "Dionysian atmosphere," that created contact between performers and audience, uniting them in their opposition to "musical dogmatism and Party prescriptions" (Barban 1985:12).

⁴⁸ Over the last two decades, Parnakh's legacy has been well established in both Russian and Western scholarship. Some of his most popular and important works have been publicized, analyzed and integrated into the literary discourse pertinent to the history and theory of the Russian literature and culture. See for example the 2012 edition of a collection of his poems, *Tri knigi* (Moskva: Sam&Sam).

To turn to jazz meant to recognize in it a form of escapism, “of flight from odious and depersonalized reality,” (Barban 1985:12) and thus to challenge the state’s monopoly over culture and the arts. To recede from it meant to avoid being crushed by a regime that controlled almost every aspect of human existence. Shostakovich, apparently, had chosen the latter. In January 1959, the *New York Times* published an article by Max Frankel entitled “Jazz is Deplored by Shostakovich.” Frankel writes that the composer expressed his great disappointment at “the passion” of young people for that “genre” and called for a healthy art instead (1958:9). Frankel referred to Shostakovich’s address to Soviet musicians published in the government newspaper *Izvestiia*, where the composer invited his colleagues to write “as much as possible about love, friendship, and comradeship, ‘heroic songs about the exploits of our people,’ about ‘conquerors of virgin lands and about mighty builders who erect electric power stations’” (cited in Frankel 1958:9).

Yet not everyone gave credence to the image of the composer as “the pride of the Soviet Union.” Solomon Volkov believes that Shostakovich “expressed himself frankly only in his music” (Volkov 1979: xiv). The author refused to rely upon articles in the official press with the composer’s name at the bottom (Volkov 1979: xv).⁴⁹ In his book, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*,⁵⁰ the typescript of which had been smuggled to the West, the musicologist describes his meetings and conversations with the composer in the 1960s and early ‘70s, at a time when Shostakovich seemed most dissatisfied and “was trying to distance himself from his music” (Volkov 1979: xiv). Volkov suggests that the fear, despair and political compromises in his creative pursuits, constituted Shostakovich’s inner rather than external tragedy. The references to his experiences with jazz as well as the episode around the orchestration of Youmans’s fox trot, and the fate of the composer’s first ballet, that had fallen into disgrace, reveals the early ‘leftist’ Shostakovich, who for many decades had remained officially banned, and “defamed in music history classes and textbooks” (Volkov 1979: xii).

In 2006, on the occasion of the composer’s 100th birthday anniversary, musicians and ballet-masters paid tribute by reviving his works after decades of disfavor. In July, 2005, the world was treated to Shostakovich’s revived avant-garde ballet *The Bright Stream (Svetlyi ruchei)*, and in February, 2006, seventy-four years after its composition, the ‘industrial ballet’ *The Bolt* was finally performed in public. When renowned choreographer Yuri Grigorovich premiered a revival of *The Golden Age* with “Tea for Two” that accompanied a gracefully-staged choreography in the Bolshoi theatre in March,⁵¹ it formed a crown in a triad of Shostakovich Ballets brought back to the Russian stage.

The belated acknowledgement did not end the ongoing discourse about the paradox surrounding syncopated music initiated in Russia by versatile

⁴⁹ Volkov writes that in many instances composers had not even been asked to sign their “own” articles, since “such a formality was considered unnecessary.”

⁵⁰ See the footnote 23 above.

⁵¹ It was also Yuri Grigorovich who staged *Golden Age* with changed libretto in 1982. The Ballet was withdrawn from the Bolshoi in 1995 to be brought back only ten years later.

artist-eccentric Valentin Parnakh. To the contrary, the increasing interest in Shostakovich's challenged legacy would inevitably lead to further exploration of the heated debates about jazz, its meaning, and its impact on the spiritual and emotional aspirations of the Soviets in the first few decades under Communist rule.

Conclusion

In comparing the charges brought against the fox trot in the West and Soviet Russia, I have shown that in both instances, jazz and salon dance were dismissed as the expression of depravity, with almost identical accusations in the contemporary American and Soviet press. I analyze how the cultural establishment and guardians of mass ideology distorted, in Levine's words, jazz meaning and its character, and often "pigeonholed it, stereotyped it, denigrated it," even though the reasons for doing so were different on either side of the Atlantic. Levine attributed "a long-standing neglect" of "a central element in American culture" (Levin 1989:11) to the disgrace of racism, while Anne Gorsuch observed that advocates for class struggle categorized jazz as the music of the bourgeois, too Western and too decadent to be propagated among the Soviet people.

During the NEP, jazz music and dances were first welcomed as a powerful artistic novelty "winning over the cultural avant-garde," but later dismissed as ideologically weak cacophony, "seducing the public at large" (Starr 1983:45). The fate of Shostakovich's orchestration of the popular dance tune "Tea for Two" and his attempt to incorporate it into classical ballet fell prey to the ideological interpretation of the music's social function. Its story brought together curiously intertwined lives of a classical composer, innovative theatre director, and avant-garde poet and choreographer, who shared the destiny of syncopated music that succumbed to the dissonant notes of political reaction, fading away in the ephemeral history of NEP Russia.

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