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Opera Criticism in Russia in the Early 21st Century: Constructing the (Non-) Soviet Style*

Opera criticism in post-Soviet Russia has had an almost 30-year history, which can be divided chronologically into three periods. The first, spanning from the 1990s to the early 2000s, is considered to be the brightest and most remarkable. During that period there emerged simultaneously two types of musical criticism – the narrowly specialized and the universal – which have coexisted together. The latter type, created by Piotr Pospelov and his colleagues and published by new Russian business publishing houses (for example, the newspaper “Kommersant-Daily”), has become prevalent in subsequent periods.

This type of musical newspaper journalism was addressed directly to the new audience of opera fans, the new Russian intellectual elite which can be labelled as the Russian Europeans – in their education, views and interests. A number of features have become normative for the New Russian musical criticism (as Olga Manulkina and Pavel Gershenson call it): a grotesque style, as expressed by shocking headlines, the demythologization of composers and compositions, a widespread use of mass genres, forms and comparisons in music stories, ironic subtext.

The discourse “music and politics” became the leading one in the reception of opera of that time. In reviews of opera productions of the Soviet era (incidentally, not necessarily Soviet in their style or ideology) the main elements of Soviet mass art are often mentioned – like Soviet songs and films, symbols of totalitarian culture – sculpture and ideological materials. Numerous Soviet stylistic features which are still well known and recognizable by readers are exploited in the style and headings. The recent manifestation of the “Soviet” style in opera receptions is atomized and fantastically synthesized with Soviet mass culture and fashion trends in the country – for instance, with the cult of Western cinema and the influence of Russian television programmes.

It was this exact construction (or reconstruction) of “Soviet” stylistic features in the opera criticism of the turn of the century that shaped the musical thinking and ideals of the “Millennials” generation in Russia.

Funding: The reported study has received financial support by the Russian Scholarly Foundation, project number 19-18-00414 (Soviet Today: Forms of Cultural Recycling in Russian Art and the Aesthetics of Everyday Life. 1990–2010s).

Keywords: Opera, New Russian music criticism, Piotr Pospelov, receptions, cultural recycling, Soviet culture.

For citation / Для цитирования: Kupets Lyubov A. Opera Criticism in Russia in the Early 21st Century: Constructing the (Non-) Soviet Style // Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship. 2020. № 3. С. 114–127. DOI: 10.33779/2587-6341.2020.3.114-127.

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Оперная критика в России начала XXI века: конструируя «несоветское»**

Оперная критика в постсоветской России имеет почти 30-летнюю историю, которая может быть представлена хронологически тремя периодами. Наиболее ярким и значимым видится первый, охватывающий 1990-е – начало 2000-х годов. На протяжении этого периода одновременно существует два типа музыкальной критики: отраслевая и универсальная. Последняя, созданная П. Пospelовым и его коллегами и представленная в новых российских деловых изданиях (например, в газете «Коммерсантъ-Daily»), становится ведущей в последующее время. Этот тип музыкальной газетной журналистики напрямую ориентирован на новую оперную публику, российскую интеллектуальную элиту – так называемых «русских европейцев», судя по образованию, взглядам, интересам. Для Новой русской музыкальной критики (как её называют О. Манулкина и П. Гершензон) нормативными становятся ряд особенностей: эпатажность стилистики и заголовков, демифологизация композиторских персон и произведений, использование в рассказах о музыке форм и сравнений, связанных с массовыми жанрами, ироничный подтекст.

Дискурс «музыка и политика» стал ведущим в оперных рецепциях этого времени. В рецензиях на постановки произведений советского времени (и не только) часто упоминаются главные элементы советского массового искусства – советские песни и фильмы, символы тоталитарной культуры – скульптура и идеологические материалы. В стилистике и заголовках эксплуатируются многочисленные советизмы, которые хорошо знакомы и узнаваемы читателями. Недавнее «советское» в оперных рецепциях атомизируется, причудливо синтезируясь с советской массовой культурой и модными тенденциями в стране – культом западного кинематографа и влиянием российских телепрограмм. Именно такая реконструкция «советского» в оперной критике рубежа веков формировала музыкальное мышление и идеалы поколения миллениалов.

Ключевые слова: опера, Новая русская музыкальная критика, Пётр Пospelов, рецепции, культурный ресайклинг, советская культура.

** Работа выполнена при финансовой поддержке РНФ в рамках научного проекта № 19-18-00414 (Советское сегодня: Формы культурного ресайклинга в российском искусстве и эстетике повседневного. 1990–2010-е годы).

Opera criticism¹ in post-Soviet Russia has already developed an impressive and intriguing history, in which certain stages, features and patterns may be distinguished. Opera criticism is often considered as a synonym for music criticism due to both the artificiality of the world-oriented genre, which has flexible response to it, and in connection with the specificity of academic music in Russia, where opera houses have always been in the center of cultural policy. Thus, opera criticism is equally interested in the cultural, economic and ideological component.

The periodization of opera criticism was first proposed in 2015 by Olga Manulkina and Pavel Gershenzon, highlighting the years 1993–2003 as the formation period of the style labelled as New Russian Music Criticism (henceforth – NRMC)². One may add that this was the time of print universal editions (“*Kommersant*”, “*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*”, etc.), although along with the aforementioned periodicals, there also existed a number of specialized magazines and newspapers (“*Muzykal'naya akademiya*”, “*Muzykal'naya zhizn*”, “*Muzykal'noe obozrenie*”), in which other models of critical expression were shown.

The 2000s must be called the second period, which sees the beginning of a gradual differentiation of musical journalism (chiefly following the venue of its functioning) begins. With the development of the Internet space, such sites as OperaNew.ru (since 2000), Belcanto.ru (since 2002) and OpenSpace.ru (since 2008) have appeared.

The third period – the 2010s – has become the time of a massive transition of musical criticism into virtual space. The electronic resources of solta.ru (since 2012) and musiccritics.ru, the sites of all magazines and newspapers, opera houses and festivals (for example, Diaghilev’s “*Zvyozdy belykh nochey*” [“The Stars of

the White Nights”]), their groups on social networks – all of these can be considered to express the result of this transition.

The genre and stylistic palette of musical journalism are changing over these decades: from short concise reviews with shocking headlines to extensive interviews and essays with branches of commentaries and “likes” counted. The discourse of modern academic opera and its critics has also appeared during this period. Musical education has developed dynamically (since 2012 there have appeared official bachelor's and master's programs in music criticism and journalism), numerous master-schools and competitions for young music critics have been held (for example, the “*Rezonans*” award since 2014)³.

What does Post-Soviet Music Criticism Begin With?

In Russia, the formation of modern music journalism applies to the early 1990s. This period can be counted as revolutionary, when the main goal was to break the stereotypes of Soviet musical criticism, to interest the wealthy classes of Russian society with classical music in an atmosphere of fierce competition with a predominance of popular culture and an absence of the policy of ideological coercion. At that time, two new ways of developing newspaper-related music journalism were identified. Depending on the place of formation and public orientation, they can be divided into narrowly focused (specialized) and wide-profile (universal). The first appeared in the newspaper “*Muzykal'noe obozrenie*” [Musical Overview] (headed by its chief editor Andrei Ustinov since 1991). The second is predominantly presented by the publications of Peter Pospelov and his colleagues in “*Kommersant-Daily*” made during the years 1993–1997. These “models-directions” were fundamentally different from each other: in terms of goals, audience, genres, style.

For professionals only

The newspaper “*Muzykal'noe obozrenie*” (hereinafter – “MO”) was created in 1989 as a branch one under the patronage of the Composers’ Union of the USSR. Consequently, a massive number of professional academic musicians, from teachers of music schools to artists of philharmonic societies, theaters, orchestras, conductors and professors of conservatories, was conceived as its target audience (both initially and subsequently). As a “supertask” – the goal of consolidating the Russian subculture of professional classical musicians and creating an internal communication system in this area was set. Moreover, at that time period this was the only specialized music newspaper in the country.

The newspaper “MO” can be called a model of musical criticism for professionals, which is evidenced by the six principles that underlie the strategy of this print publishing house.

1. Explicit directedness on information, at the center of which there is basically a fact or the event, the veracity of which is documented and confirmed by a mass of details. For example, reports about the season of the Rostov and Nizhny-Novgorod Conservatories, chamber orchestras or even concert subscriptions of the Grand Hall of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Society, with the specification of the number of concerts and the cost of each subscription.

2. An interest in expert assessment, which basically expresses the opinions of musical newsmakers (famous people – creators and managers). On the one hand, this tendency increases the credibility of the fact, confirmed by the Individual and the Professional. On the other hand, it creates the necessary freedom within the professional community, providing readers with the right to make their own opinions and conclusions.

Such are the arguments of the famous musicologist Ekaterina Tsareva about the history of music and the 19th century, which she specializes in, her attitudes of historical instruments and the issues of authentic performance as it is developed by the unique enthusiast Alexei Lyubimov.

3. The aspiration for achieving a high level of objectivity in the rubrication and stylistics of presentation of materials. On the first page of the newspaper there is an absence of an “individual” as the main person representing the newspaper edition – the events and issues are considered more important than actual people. Thus, for example, in the summer editions in 2006 on the front page both the quotation of Mstislav Rostropovich (without a photograph) and the “Melodia” logo are of importance: both screensavers are described in detail on the following pages. Another feature is the drift towards a neutral presentation style: the shedding of subjective and expressive vocabulary. This results in a peculiar type of “objective” style. This primarily applies to information materials, including the “CD-Review” application, calendars of festivals and competitions. At the same time, the author’s “personality” is vividly traced in the genre of the interview both in the questions the respondents are asked and, of course, in the answers themselves, which model the oral and highly individual speech of the main protagonists of these articles.

4. The variety of genres used. Among them the prevailing ones are, of course, informational genres, which are consistent with the general concept of “MO”. A significant position is also occupied by analytical strips, which are usually devoted to the largest events: for example, the most detailed coverage of the 12th Tchaikovsky Competition, and even individual articles about the work of the Press Center and analysis of the audience attending the

competition. It is worthwhile mentioning that the artistic and journalistic genres, being in themselves the most advanced in literary processing and original authorial style, as well as most interpretative in their core, are basically absent from the list of publications in this newspaper.

5. The desire to expand the audience is combined with the attention to individual segments. “MO” is the only Moscow-based edition which from almost its very beginning presented itself as a newspaper representing all of Russia. It is a periodical on the pages of which the geography of the entire country and all of regions are clearly visible: from north to south (from Vorkuta to Astrakhan), and from east to west (from Vladivostok to Kaliningrad). The active use of regional news resources throughout the country allowed the newspaper to create a topical panorama of real musical life in the country, and not merely in the “two capitals” and a few other large cities. In fact, each edition presented a musical journey throughout Russia with the representation of each of the regions of the Russian Federation. For example, on one newspaper column it is possible to find out about current events in the opera houses of cities of Perm, Voronezh, Nizhny Novgorod. Moreover, constituent mini-newspapers have regularly appeared within the overall newspaper itself dedicated to a certain region of the country and published together with a it, thereby “MO” functioned as a means of “familiarization” by “elucidating” a particular city or a region.

The process of segmentation of the audience has taken place naturally, based on the musicians’ particular specializations, which is expressed in the newspaper’s headings, such as: “Orchestras”, “The Philharmonic Society”, “Theaters”, “Competitions”, etc. Thereby, in one edition of the newspaper an avid reader was able to compare the conditions, for

example, of the symphony orchestras of different cities and regions of the country for a number of objective indicators: the number of concerts per year, their touring activities, their repertoire list, etc.

6. A clearly defined positioning of this publishing house for professional musicians of various specialties. The idea of consolidation and creation of a unified informational space within the framework of a professional musical community is expressed in the “MO” by means of such signs as:

- the compositional algorithm of each edition, where the rubrics are similar to the keywords, which in themselves are significant for any musician;
- a clear prevalence of the verbal over the visual element (albeit, with a special unique label – a picture or photo on the front cover);
- the selection of topics, which are more likely to be of some interest to the professional subculture of academic musicians rather than being of importance for the public globally. For example, the topics could be the announcements of music competitions and festivals and their results, reviews of published books on the art of music or CDs of classical compositions performed by young (albeit already famous) musicians, relevant problems in the field of higher musical education, or emergency situations in particular organizations⁴.

Entertaining by teaching

Another strategy was chosen by Pospelov and his colleagues (Olga Manulkina, Boris Filanovsky, Mikhail Fichtengolts, Ekaterina Biryukova, Alexei Parin, Gyulara Sadykhzade, etc.) by focusing on a completely different type of reader in their texts, published by “universal” newspapers⁵. As an example, the audience of “Kommersant-Daily”, a socio-political newspaper which has created business journalism in modern

Russia, may be predominantly regarded as a domain for the new intellectual elite: people who can be categorized as the new Russian Europeans – by their education, their views, and their fields of professional interest⁶. These are usually fairly young professionals related to business and economy, focused on Western standards and values; who possess a good knowledge of foreign languages, but are not necessarily professional musicians.

This new “consumer of culture” is the precise concept which the creation of a new model is based on; musical journalism is created within the framework of so-called mass journalism, within which an attempt to combine musical professionalism and important cultural and artistic issues with advertising, modern intellectual and “everyday” slang was made. Such kind of journalism sought to carry out educational tasks among a certain audience using language, that these people understood, inserting academic music into their picture of the world. In this situation, the predominant use of the genre of an extremely brief review, concise in its scale and thought, which is obviously subjective, on the verge of being scandalous. This type of review is characterized by the demythologization of composers and their works, an ironic subtext. It broadly incorporates extra-musical associations, most notably approaching the direction of politics and mass culture, and also makes broad usage of deliberate stylization of low genres (even to the degree of texts about crime)⁷.

Spectacular effects have been produced by shocking headlines of the articles themselves, replicating advertising principles and built on the use of oxymorons, well-known associations, numerous paraphrases and wordplay. As a rule, the main idea or opinion of the author is contained in these headlines, sometimes even a certain slogan that offers

the listener a clear visual plan: how to hear, think and perceive this music. For example⁸:

Klassika v Rossii – eto nemetskoe i sovetskoe [Classics in Russia are German and Soviet] (about Alfred Schnittke),

Bellini, Verdi, Getti, Donitsetti i dalee po alfavitu [Bellini, Verdi, Getty, Donizetti and Further on in Alphabetical Order],

Iskusstvo za, iskusstvo protiv, iskusstvo dlya [Art in Support of Something, Art Against Something, Art Used for Something] (concerning Mauricio Kagel),

Paul' Khindemit – kompozitor iz dinamita [Paul Hindemith is a Composer made of Dynamite],

Vagner v Mariinskom teatre: rubikon pereyden [Wagner at the Mariinsky Theater: The Rubicon has been Crossed],

Russkiy Bayreyt i kovrik s lebedyami [The Russian Bayreuth and a Rug with Swans] (about “Sadko” by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov),

V Mariinke postavili na Prokof'eva i vyigrali [In Mariinsky theater they Set their Bets on Prokofiev and Won],

Nezabytyy neshedevr [An Unforgotten Non-Masterpiece] (about Alexander Mosolov's opera “Geroy” [The Hero]),

Amputirovannyi Verdi [Amputated Verdi] (about a production of Verdi's “Traviata”),

Mussorgsky – Rimsky-Korsakov + Gergiev = ? [about a production of Mussorgsky's “Boris Godunov”],

Tantsy glazastykh kontrabasov [The Dances of Big-Eyed Double-Basses] (about a production of Glinka's “Ruslan and Lyudmila”),

Zhizn' s idiotom polna neozhidannostey [Life Alongside the Idiot is full of Unexpectancies] (about a production of Schnittke's opera),

Prints rassmeyalsya, vy zametili? [The Prince Laughed, did you Notice?] (about a production of Prokofiev's “The Love for Three Oranges”),

Bol'shoy teatr provodit dezinfektsiyu naslediya prezhnego rukovodstva moyushchim sredstvom 1945 god [The Bolshoi Theater Carries Out a Disinfection of the Legacy of the Previous Directory by Means of Detergent from 1945] (about a production of Glinka's "A Life for the Tsar"),

V Mariinke pokazali goluyu zhenshchinu [They Showed a Naked Woman at the Mariinsky Theater] (about a production of R. Strauss "Salome"),

Makbetu dali avtomat [Macbeth was Handed a Gun] (about a production of Verdi's "Macbeth"),

Bol'shoy gesheft [Big Gesheft] (about a production of Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin"),

Chisto angliyskaya opera [A Purely English opera] (about a production of Benjamin Britten's "The Turn of the Screw"),

Seks, narkotiki i kul't lichnosti [Sex, Drugs and the Personality Cult] (about Tchaikovsky's "The Queen of Spades"),

(Ne)narodnaya (ne)muzykal'naya (ne)drama [(Non-)Folk (Non-)Musical (Non-)Drama] (about Mussorgsky "Boris Godunov").

This direction can be considered a kind of Russian transformation of Western musical journalism, continuing the line of the elegant Claude Debussy and the brilliant George Bernard Shaw, who wrote for everyone who bought and read newspapers, regardless of whether or not they had a musical education. This model is better to describe as a universal type of music journalism, where music is tightly sewn into the wide cultural and social landscape of Russia. This position was adhered to by almost all universal periodicals which published texts on classical music (for example, "Vedomosti", "Segodnya", "Izvestia" and "Russkiy telegraf").

Retrospectively, one can conclude that the leading model in Russia of that time was the universal style, or as it was later

called – NRMK, whose creators could be correctly classified as the discursive expert community. It was precisely that community which formed the tastes and opinions of the newspaper readers of the post-Soviet times, both laymen and professional musicians. There is no doubt that in these texts, (already) post-Soviet in their style and outlook, the country's recent past with its extensive Soviet discourse is explicitly or indirectly conceptualized.

Constructing the "Soviet" Element, Albeit, not Exclusively

An important point for pondering on this topic was the first volume of the three-volume edition "New Russian Music Criticism. 1993–2003", which contains published articles about opera during that decade⁹. The index of names [8, pp. 559–575] demonstrates not only a clear attempt to distinguish the period from the Soviet past (which are, in fact, quite close to each other, both in terms of the artistic practice of opera companies and the approaches of the music critics), but also an active construction of the "Soviet" element out of different perspectives and in other historical, cultural and social conditions.

If one should attempt to compile the layout of a frequency dictionary, it becomes obvious that among the "Soviet composers" the undisputed precedence belongs to the "prodigal son of Soviet music" Sergei Prokofiev (42 references), followed by the country's undisputed coryphaeus Dmitri Shostakovich (34). The third place (by a wide margin) is reserved to the "first Soviet avant-gardist" Alfred Schnittke (11), followed by the "academician of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries" Alexander Glazunov, who did not write a single opera (10). Further on, previously incomparable figures are mentioned on an equal footing – Leningrad-based composer, chiefly of choral music,

settings of poetry of the Russian Silver Age Yuri Falik, the second representative of the Russian post-war avant-garde Edison Denisov and the permanent chairman of the Soviet Composers' Union Tikhon Khrennikov (5); the "Father" of Soviet musicology Boris Asafiev (3); the intellectual and philosophical Sofia Gubaidulina, the patriarch of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg school Sergei Slonimsky, the undisputed musical leader of all times (especially the Soviet period) Ludwig van Beethoven (2) and various composers of the Soviet era with a wide variety of biographical and artistic trajectories – Boris Tishchenko, Rodion Shchedrin, Ivan Dzerzhinsky, Alexander Davidenko, Alexander Mosolov, Dmitri Kabalevsky, Georgy Sviridov (1). Attention is also drawn to the emphasis of the two most important figures of the Russian-born artists who developed their art from outside of Russia – composer Igor Stravinsky (32 references) and ballet producer Sergei Diaghilev (11), who would easily get into the top 5 of this virtual dictionary in terms of the frequency of references in critical texts. Moreover, Stravinsky would compete with Shostakovich, and Diaghilev – with Glazunov. The general sequence of the "magnificent five" of the 20th century Russian/Soviet artists would appear as follows: Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Diaghilev and Glazunov respectively. In other words, in this choice and hierarchy of names, the outlines of cultural recycling can already be recognized. In its turn, the process of cultural recycling is characterized by the advent of reappreciation the era of the Russian Silver Age, when the Soviet past is getting gradually replaced by the Russian present.

The multiple names of famous contemporary political figures in Russia and other countries include such well-known names as Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Gennady Zyuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy,

Mikhail Kasyanov, Saddam Hussein, Fidel Castro, Hillary Clinton, George Bush and Wjciech Jaruzelski (1 mention each) can be called a sign of times. The "top ranking" of politicians in this picture of the world are the following: Joseph Stalin (9), Vladimir Putin (6), Vladimir Lenin, Leonid Brezhnev, Mikhail Shvydkoi and Anatoly Sobchak (2 references each).

At the same time, the interest in post-Soviet musical criticism is by no means directed at "Soviet composers". Among the undisputed leaders are: Verdi (70), Rimsky-Korsakov (62), Wagner (58), Tchaikovsky (56), Mozart (54) and Mussorgsky (44). Of considerable interest are Glinka (26) и Puccini (21), while much less attention is bestowed upon Borodin (17), Richard Strauss (13) and Donizetti (11). Further on along the decreasing side are: Vladimir Kobekin (10), Leonid Desyatnikov (9), Alexander Dargomyzhsky and Anton Rubinstein (8), Jacques Offenbach (7); Johann Strauss, Alexander Serov, Bizet, Messiaen, Monteverdi (6); Gluck, Debussy, Massenet, Salieri and Eduard Napravnik (5); Rossini, Michael Nyman and Poulenc (4); Mahler, Meyerbeer, Ravel, Alexander Zemlinsky and Alexander Tchaikovsky (3); Schumann, Szymanowski, Cimarosa, Cilea, Hindemith, Scriabin, Gounod, Moniuszko, Cui, Kalman and Gershwin (2); Handel, Clara Schumann, Schubert, Leos Janáček, Evstigney Fomin, Yuri Falik, Scarlatti, Purcell, Anatoly Lyadov, Mascagni, Lulli, Křenek, John Cage, Steve Reich, Ottorino Respighi, Manuel de Falla, Piazzolla, Anton Webern, Carl Maria von Weber, Alexander Knaifel, Alexander Mosolov, Jacopo Peri and Rodion Shchedrin (1).

The discourse of "music and politics" can be considered as being central in the opera criticism of that time. It is also expressed in the index of compositions, where alongside the operas of the Soviet era with strong

ideological content – Prokofiev (“Betrothal in a Monastery”, “Semyon Kotko”), Shostakovich (“The Gamblers”, “The Nose”, “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District”, “Katerina Ismailova”), Ivan Dzerzhinsky (“Quiet Flows the Don”/“Tikhiy Don”), Vano Muradeli (“The Great Friendship”), – a number of other compositions, written in other genres, but closely related to the history of the Soviet country, are mentioned: the ballets “Spartacus” by Aram Khachaturian and “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” by Boris Asafyev, Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 4, Symphony No. 7 (“Leningrad”), “Rayok” (Little Paradise), operetta “Moscow, Cheryomushki”, ballet “The Limpid Stream” (a.k.a.), “The Bright Stream”, Sonata No. 2 for piano in B minor and Sonata for Viola and Piano.

Despite the fact that these journalistic texts about opera pertain to a purely academic genre, the key markers of Soviet musical mass culture can also be found there, for example: Soviet songs by Tikhon Khrennikov, Isaak Dunaevsky, Matvey Blanter, the Pokrass brothers (“*Vzveytes' kostrami, sinie nochī*” [Soar Up with Bonfires, Blue Nights], “*Proshchal'naya komsomol'skaya*” [Farewell Komsomol Song], “*Idi, lyubimyy*” [Come, Beloved], “*Marsh entuziastov*” [March of the Enthusiasts], “*Chto tak serdtse rastrevozhenno*” [Why is the Heart Alarmed], “*Katyusha*”, “*Serdtshe*” [Heart]) and films of the Soviet era from the 1930s, 1940s, 1960s and even as late as the second half of the 1980s: Eisenstein’s “Ivan the Terrible” with music by Prokofiev, “Musical History” and “Anton Ivanovich is Angry” by Alexander Ivanovsky, with music by Kabalevsky, “Stalker” and “Andrei Rublev” by Arseny Tarkovsky with music of Eduard Artemyev and Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov, “Nine Days of One Year” by Mikhail Romm with music by Ter-Tevosyan, “*Seryozny yunoshā*” [The

Serious Young Man] by Abraam Room with music by Gavriil Popov, “The Great Citizen” by Friedrich Ermler with music by Shostakovich, and “Kin-dza-za” by Georgy Daneli with music by Giya Kancheli. There is frequent mention of the cult Soviet cartoon – “The Bremen Town Musicians” with music by Gennady Gladkov.

The perspective of politics in the interpretation of music is demonstrated by the introduced symbols of totalitarian culture: newspaper articles with titles, such as “*Baletnaya fal'sh*” [Ballet Falsehood] and “*Sumbur vmesto muzyki*” [Muddle Instead of Music: On the Opera Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District], “History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course”, and “The Sculptural Group ‘The Worker and the Kolkhoz Woman.’” Many headlines of reviews abound with “Sovietisms”¹⁰, which are not in the least limited to discussion of compositions of the Soviet period. For example:

Vashi shest' sotok [Your Six Acres]¹¹ (about a production of Rimsky-Korsakov’s “The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya”),

Pesnya o rodine [Song of the Motherland]¹² (about a production of Prokofiev’s “Betrothal in a Monastery”),

Nash otvet Arnonkuru [Our answer to Arnoncur]¹³ (about a production of Monteverdi “L'incoronazione di Poppea”),

Borodataya opera dlya borodatogo turista [A Barbigerous Opera for a Bearded Tourist]¹⁴ (about a production of Mussorgsky’s “Boris Godunov”),

Nadezhno, vygodno, udobno [Reliable, Profitable, Convenient]¹⁵ (about a production of Puccini’s “Tosca”),

Porka Shostakovichem [A Flogging by Shostakovich]¹⁶ (about a production of Shostakovich “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District”),

Patriotizm bez agressii [Patriotism

without Aggression]¹⁷ (about a production of Prokofiev's "War and Peace"),

Valeriy Gergiev ne zhdal milostey u prirody [Valery Gergiev did not Expect Favors from Nature]¹⁸ (about a production of Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov"),

V svoikh derzaniyakh vsegda my pravy [In our Endeavors we are Always Right]¹⁹ (about a production of Mussorgsky's "Boris Godunov"),

Novyy «Kitezh» i genplan Gergieva [The new "Kitezh" and the Gergiev's General Plan]²⁰ (about a production of Rimsky-Korsakov's "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevroniya")..

It can be argued that in the classical music of the late 20th and early 21st centuries the recent "Soviet" elements are becoming diffused, connecting actively and bizarrely with Soviet mass culture and with various trends in the culture of post-Soviet Russia. In addition to politicization, opera criticism hears and interprets works, after itself being strongly influenced by cinema and television programs.

The list of mentioned films is impressive, and the authors are the luminaries of the Western (American, British, Italian and Danish) film industry, both the elite and the mass variety. This filmography includes movies created in different genres from the 1930s to the 2000s: two cult cinema epics – "Star Wars" by George Lucas (original trilogy 1977–1983, space opera, 7 "Oscars") and "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" by Peter Jackson (2001, composer Howard Shore, 4 "Oscars"); "The Blue Angel" by Josef von Sternberg (1930, music by Friedrich Hollander, with Marlene Dietrich) and "The Death of Pompeii" by Cooper and Shodsak (1935, by the authors of "King Kong"); "Cleopatra" by Mankevich (1963, peplum, 4 "Oscars", music by Alex North) and "Apocalypse Today" by Coppola (1979, about the Vietnam War); "The Tutsi"

by Pollack (1982, 1 "Oscar" Prize), "Ginger and Fred" (1986) and "And the Ship Sails On" (1983) by Fellini; "The Last Temptation of Christ" by Scorsese (1988) and "The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover" by Greenaway (1989, music by Michael Nyman), "Breaking the Waves" by von Trier (1996, 1 "Oscar", direction "Dogma 95"), "Saving the Private Ryan" by Spielberg (1999, who received 5 "Oscars", about the events of the Second World War) and the television movie "The Great Gatsby" Markowitz (2000, music by Carl Davis).

The introduction of products and modern Russian mass culture becomes natural for reviews: from the songs "*Esaul*" [Yesaul] by Oleg Gazmanov, the romance "*Poruchik Golitsyn*" [Lieutenant Golitsyn], "*Institutka*" by Maria Vega to "*Po doroge v Gollivud*" [On the Way to Hollywood] (Valeriy Leont'ev's show), "*sNezhnoe show*" [Gentle Snow Show] (a play by Vyacheslav Polunin), "*Starye pesni o glavnom*" [Old songs about Most Crucial Things] (a television project by Leonid Parfenov and Konstantin Ernst), the ice show "*Holiday on Ice*". In this context, mentioning Rice's and Webber's rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar" seems almost academic.

A lot of attention in opera reviews is given to literary and epistolary texts. Usually music critics always analyze the original literary source of the composition or the epistolary legacy associated with a particular composer: Mozart's letters, "The letters of Dmitry Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman" or Prokofiev's autobiography. However, there are also other artifacts of art which freely appear in the texts in accordance with the associative design of the authors: the essay "*Eros Moskv*" [The Eros of Moscow] and the novel "*Goluboe Salo*" [The Blue Lard] by Vladimir Sorokin, "*Pegiy pes, begushchiy kraem morya*" [The Piebald Dog, Running Over the Sea] by Chingiz

Aitmatov, the painting “The Apotheosis of War” by Vassily Vereshchagin, the play “*Vzróslyaya dóch' molodógo chelovéka*” [The Grown-up Daughter of a Young Man] by Anatoly Vasiliev (with jazz music by Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington and others).

The adjective delineating the “Soviet” element itself, its derivatives and paraphrases of the so-called “Sovietism” (words and expressions which appeared and became widespread in the Soviet era) in the titles of reviews are assessed as either something unambiguously negative: for example, Alexei Parin “*Stravinskiy po-sovetski*” [Stravinsky in a Soviet Style] [8, pp. 23–24], his “*Materye chelovechishchi*” [Inveterate Humans] (“Prince Igor” at the Bolshoi Theater) [8, pp. 32–33], or as a myth that did not actually exist: Olga Manulkina ““*Sovetskaya' opera Prokofeva v Mariinke*” [A “Soviet” Opera by Prokofiev at the Mariinsky Theater] (about “Semyon Kotko”) [8, pp. 276–278], where the quotation marks explicitly state that this is an opera created, as it may seem, as part of the socialist realism canon and presented in 1940 for the Stalin Prize, but in reality was not Soviet at all, and therefore did not receive the prize – that’s exactly what is argued by the reviewer.

It is exactly at this time when the canon of the names and interpretations of the “Soviet” elements in classical music began to form from the perspective of the post-Soviet views of Russian music critics. There are two sustainable ones among them:

1. Neither Prokofiev, nor Shostakovich are Soviet composers. Thus, their operas (and all compositions) written in the USSR are not Soviet. Moreover, as a possible and naturally predicted conclusion from the reader: the phenomenon of “Soviet opera” for the public at the beginning of the 21st century simply does not exist.

2. Under the notion “Soviet” one can imply either an exclusively mythological

interpretation of any opera composition and its author (not only from the Soviet era) made to comply the Soviet ideology or opera performances of the Soviet era, accepted by theaters without explicit directorial alterations.

The ambiguity of the interpretation of Soviet discourse is evidenced by the fact that, along with the introduction of compositions of Stravinsky and Prokofiev's operas written outside of Russia into the post-Soviet musical and theater practice, the largest number of reviews are devoted to the popular canon of opera hits from Russia and from other countries which had developed in the Soviet era into a so-called “Soviet Golden Opera Fund”: Modest Mussorgsky (“Boris Godunov”, “Khovanshchina”), Mikhail Glinka (“A Life for the Tsar”/“Ivan Susanin”, “Ruslan and Lyudmila”), Alexander Borodin (“Prince Igor”), Piotr Tchaikovsky (“The Queen of Spades”, “Eugene Onegin”), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (“The Snow Maiden”, “Sadko”), and Georges Bizet (“Carmen”), Giuseppe Verdi (“Aida”, “Rigoletto”, “La Traviata”), Giacomo Puccini (“La Bohème”, “Madama Butterfly”), Johann Strauss (“Die Fledermaus”). Thus, a large pool of “Soviet” opera hits still remains within the framework of already non-Soviet theatrical practices and views.

Yet, undoubtedly, the idol of these years was Richard Wagner, through whose compositions the NMRC (whether voluntarily or not) heard, saw and understood all other compositions. This choice clearly pointed to the Art Nouveau era in Russia with its Wagner cult in all forms of art. The increase in importance of Rimsky-Korsakov with his “Tale of the Invisible City of Kitezh” and “Kashchey Bessmertny,” which was read through the prism of Russian Wagnerism, also becomes quite understandable. From this perspective,

Russian opera criticism of the turn of the 21st century is heard as a rhyme of a century ago, when “*Russkaya muzykal'naya gazeta*” by Nikolai Findeisen dynamically created a musical picture of the Silver Age world.

A century later, fundamental changes in opera criticism are becoming visible: for modern criticism the main characters in the opera are not the solo singers, but the conductors (primarily Valeriy Gergiev, then Evgeny Kolobov). In turn, the true masters of the thoughts of musical critics are the directors – Yuri Alexandrov, Dmitri Bertman, Boris Pokrovsky, Alexander Titel with their individual vision of opera compositions.

As a result of such a reorientation – opera gradually transforms (from the musical and theatrical genre) to a visual representation, sometimes with elements of entertainment show, actively exploiting symbols of the Soviet past, transforming and mixing them, for its own purposes.

Musical (opera) criticism, like a mirror, reflects these changes on the Russian opera stage, voluntarily or involuntarily inserting “Sovietisms” in their texts. This way the process of recycling the “Soviet” element in cultural practices of the millennium and the construction of the (non) Soviet past in the present begins ²¹.

NOTES

¹ Here and further in the article the words “criticism”, “journalism” and “documentary” will be used as synonyms. Although attempts to distinguish these concepts are made, at the moment there is no stable unified opinion on this issue.

² About the self-identification of the NRMC [1].

³ This article is based on a presentation made at the International Conference in Moscow in 2019 and the theses published here [11].

⁴ For more information about this direction, see [4, pp. 233–246].

⁵ About the style of Piotr Pospelov of the 1990s, see [5].

⁶ About the influence of the changed era on the NRMC and its new reader, see [2].

⁷ The new type of musical television journalism in Russia was characterized by similar trends [3].

⁸ Hereinafter, the names of articles collected on the website “*Muzykal'naya kritika*” [7], as well as in volume 1 of the review edition, are given [8].

⁹ The assessment of the entire publication is presented in Mikhail Segelman's review [9].

¹⁰ For the definition of Sovietisms, their classification and differentiation, see [6, pp. 6–21].

¹¹ A garden plot, being given freely for citizens of the USSR by the state in late 1960s and early 1970s.

¹² “Broad is my Homeland ...” – a Soviet patriotic song written by the poet Vasily Lebedev-Kumach and composer Isaac Dunaevsky for the film “Circus”, which became extremely popular partly because of the wide usage of the first chords of the song as the call signs for the All-Soviet Radio since 1939.

¹³ “Our answer to Chamberlain” is the slogan that appeared after the publication of a note-response to a note from the British government in the newspaper “Pravda” on March 2, 1927.

¹⁴ The “Bearded Tourist” was a type of Soviet intellectual freethinker who made up the typical audience of the Grushinsky Festival – the oldest song festival of popular songs, which has been held since 1968 on the Volga near the city of Kuybyshev (now Samara).

¹⁵ From an advertisement of Soviet savings banks, which appeared around 1947.

¹⁶ Perhaps a reference to a “demonstrative flogging” in the USSR for ideological reasons (for example, about the opera of Vano Muradeli in 1948).

¹⁷ Here the author transforms the concept of patriotism, fundamental to the Soviet identity.

¹⁸ “We cannot wait for mercies from nature, to take them from her is our task”. These words of Ivan Michurin were published in the introduction to the 3rd edition of his works in 1934.

¹⁹ From the “March of the Enthusiasts (text by Anatoly D’Actil, music by Isaak Dunaevsky)”

from the film “The Bright Way” (1940).

²⁰ The general plan was master plan of the city.

²¹ For information on recycling in the 21st century, see, for example [10; 12].

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