A Musical Inquisition?

Soviet 'Deputies' of Musical Entertainment in Hungary during the Early 1950s

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At the beginning of 1948, the Soviet government began to intervene in the internal affairs of musical life in the Soviet Union. The major party ideologist Andrei Zhdanov outlined the new aesthetic principles in two speeches during the convention of Soviet musical experts in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in which he incited his audience to struggle against formalism and cosmopolitanism. When on 10 February 1948, his words became party decree (Zhdanov), the process of creating socialist realist aesthetics of music, based on the idea that musical aesthetics had to correspond to communist values defined by the CPSU, appeared to be accomplished. From then on, Zhdanov's speeches (and the decree in the wake of them) were looked upon as unquestionable measures for every kind of music in the Soviet Union and the rapidly Sovietized satellite states in Eastern Europe. Especially from 1949 on, the Soviet policy of adopting socialist realist aesthetics was also emulated in Hungary. The local communist government identified this policy as the only model for Hungarian musical politics and ideology. It can already be documented, however, that nobody gave exact orders or analyzed in what manner this model should properly be followed. In my chapter I argue that the so-called musical revolution and the transformation of musical life according to Zhdanovian socialist realist principles was a rather arbitrary and improvised initiative, in which Hungarian policy makers and musical experts often used the Soviet ideas and prescriptions only as pretexts for Sovietizing the music scene according to their own personal plans.

In fact, local experts and musicians tended to have only a superficial knowledge of musical socialist realism and Soviet music due to language diffi-

culties, especially the genres of the so-called *bitovaya muzyka* (everyday or popular music).[1] The intentions of Soviet musical advisors and guests, who visited Hungary, were primarily to hammer into Hungarian heads the basic Zhdanovian demands about eliminating the gaps between art music and popular music or finding folk musical origins in all kinds of musical compositions. In their lectures and presentations given in Hungary, however, the Soviets very rarely referred to the theoretical background of socialist realism or detailed descriptions of how to manage this transformation process. Notwithstanding these circumstances, music diplomacy played an important role in the Sovietization of both art and entertainment music in Hungary. By examining the Soviet-Hungarian intercultural and musical relations during the High Stalinist period (1949-1953), I will inquire about the extent of Soviet influence in the Sovietized Hungarian popular musical arena.

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY AND HUNGARY

Historians of Soviet foreign policy and Soviet-Hungarian bilateral relations all agree that Hungary was geopolitically marginal within the Soviet sphere of influence before 1953/54 (Borhi; Borsody; Hajdú; Baráth, *Kreml Árnyékában*). It is obvious, however, that the Soviet Union influenced both foreign and domestic policies in Hungary already from the very end of World War II. Still, the USSR paid little attention to popularizing the communist worldview or the Soviet-type social system and lifestyle before the aggravation of the Cold War in 1948.

The turning point in international relations took place in 1949 when the so-called system of political vassalage reached its developed form. Political vassalage describes the process by which Eastern European governments, including the Hungarian one, became subordinated to the Kremlin. Anxious to gain the favor of Stalin, party leader Mátyás Rákosi repeatedly tried to surpass Soviet expectations (Rainer 91-100). The Soviets relied on the help of their satellites in both

1 In my paper, I systematically avoid using the widely used but normative term 'light music' (*könnyűzene* in Hungarian) while maintaining the distinction between the concepts of pop music and popular music. The former is generally used to refer to the musical lineage originating in the rock and roll of the second half of the 1950s, including the many trends of beat and rock music. Popular music, however, similar to the Russian term, *bitovaya muzyka*, is to be understood as a much wider, dynamic, socially, historically, and politically invested category which includes a large number of traditions and genres ranging from operetta to jazz, dance, and folk music.

economic and military terms. The Sovietization of Hungarian society and culture, however, was generally not reckoned among the most perennial topics of Soviet foreign policy. Cultural Sovietization was more in the interest of the Hungarian communist party than in Moscow's.

According to the evidence collected by the historian Magdolna Baráth ("Testvéri"; "T. et.-nak átadva"), one of the major consequences of the vassalage was the involvement of Soviet *advisors* (usually party officials, diplomats, soldiers, members of secret policy, or experts) in various fields of everyday life in Hungary. That the control of economic, military and intelligence activities enjoyed priority is indicated by the fact that the first advisors from 1948 worked mainly in these domains. Their growing presence in Hungary's cultural and civil life, however, could be observed only after 1950 (Baráth, *Kreml Árnyékában*).

One should emphasize that these advisors, who held greater power than Hungarian officials, acted on Soviet orders, even though they had always been formally invited by the host countries. Officers in the Hungarian ministries and institutions often sought the help of their Soviet colleagues who initially only provided assistance in the tasks required by Moscow or the Hungarian government, but later on they also worked for both the Soviet and Hungarian secret services. Theoretically, advisors did not have the authority to give direct instructions to local institutions. Notwithstanding, their words were often received as commands. Their communication has not been exposed to careful historical examination due to the nature (or even absence) of evidence as Soviet advisors preferred private conversations over public statements in order to avoid publicity.

SOVIET-HUNGARIAN CULTURAL RELATIONS IN THE 1940S AND 1950S

Cultural relations between the Soviet Union and Hungary were formally coordinated by the state-funded Hungarian-Soviet (Friendship) Society (Magyar-Szovjet [Baráti] Társaság) which was established in Budapest shortly after World War II in June 1945. In its first few years, the Society tried to recruit those who were interested in Soviet culture and obtained the support of prominent intellectuals such as Albert Szent-Györgyi, Zoltán Kodály, or Gyula Illyés. Initially the creation of a mass organization of "millions of people" and the

Cultural Sovietization of Hungary were not on the agenda until 1948/49.[2] Radical changes concerning the reorganization of Hungary's cultural life started only from 1949 on. Scholars point towards different events which may have encouraged the Hungarian Communist Party to initiate the so-called Cultural Revolution, the transformation of Hungarian culture according to Stalinist principles. Some emphasize the importance of the visit of Soviet composer Mihail Chulaki in February 1949 (Standeisky 164-66), while others focus on the role of a ministerial deputy (Vladimir Baikov) who was not satisfied with the efficiency of the Hungarian ideological struggle against American influences (Baráth, "A Szovjetunióról" 66).

In May 1949, Mátyás Rákosi, General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party and Stalin supporter, issued a call for the Cultural Revolution after winning the one-party elections. The so-called Agitation and Propaganda College of the Hungarian Working People's Party (HWPP) decided on immediate measures concerning the promotion of the Soviet Union already in June 1949. For that purpose, the College expressed the completely unrealistic demand of setting up a group responsible for the propagation of the Soviet way of life within a mere few weeks. The College wanted to establish literary, theatrical, and musical committees in order to realize "the drastic overhaul of the cultural front, regarding the basic principles of Soviet culture."[3]

József Révai, the Party's major Stalinist ideologist and Minister of Public Education, supplemented these objectives in his programmatic article entitled "Let Us Learn from Soviet Culture" ("Tanuljunk a szovjet kultúrából") which was published in the newly released journal *Szovjet Kultúra* (Soviet Culture):

> We have not yet met the requirements of getting acquainted with Soviet culture. An occasional acquaintance with this culture … is important, but insufficient. We need to get acquainted with it *continuously* in order to facilitate its integral and constant influence on our new, improving culture. (Révai "Szovjet Kultúra" 1, emphasis in original, all translations are my own)[4]

2 MNL OL P2148, 1. d. Cited according to the Hungarian archival citation system. D. refers to *doboz* (box).

3 MNL OL M-KS 276 f. 54/32. ő.e. (f. refers to fonds, ő.e. is an abbreviation of *őrzési egység*, a smaller unit such as a folder within a fonds).

4 "a szovjet kultúra komoly megismerése érdekében eddig nem tettünk eleget. Az alkalmi ismerkedés ezzel a kultúrával . . . fontos, de nem elegendő. Arra van szükség, hogy *folyamatosan* ismerkedjünk ezzel a kultúrával, hogy lehetővé tegyük szerves és *állandó* hatását, a mi születő, új kultúránkra."

From then on, the party propagated the Soviet Union as a *utopian* state, re-narrating Soviet-Hungarian cultural relationships and subordinating them to the myth of an interstate friendship.[5] Drawing attention to the advantages of friendship between the two nations, Révai wrote: "the Soviet Union gives us more than we give and can give to her … In establishing a socialist state, society, economy and culture, the Soviet Union is far more experienced than our nation" ("Szovjet Kultúra" 3).[6] Révai still emphasized the importance of remaining loyal to the Soviets in his speech which he delivered at the second congress of the Hungarian-Soviet Society in February 1953 ("Révai József" 3-4). Ferenc Erdei, Excecutive Director of the Society, tried to surpass him by expressing appreciation for the Soviet artists and scientist who "helped us generously" and who "lent wings to the workers of Hungarian culture with their art and education" (MNL OL P2148 1. d.).[7]

THE REPRESENTATIVE PUBLIC SPHERE

Hungarian ministries and institutions tried to introduce Soviet cultural products and methods in many different ways. One might stress the importance of written documents (such as the translation of Soviet fiction, philosophy, media coverage, academic books and articles), visual culture (such as paintings and photographs) and music (such as records), or the presence of the above-mentioned advisors. The role of official Soviet *deputies and guests*, however, seems to have been even more important from my point of interest. These guests (usually artists, writers, and scholars) usually visited the satellite states on ceremonial or festive occasions, and they were instructed to represent the current official position of the Soviet government in the limelight of publicity while advisors often remained incognito.

The so-called Friendship Months, which became one of the major symbols of interstate cultural relations, were among the most significant public events which

5 On the ideological background of the term Great Friendship, and the Polish and Eastern-German comparison see Behrends.

6 "A Szovjetunió többet ad nekünk, mint amennyit mi adunk és adhatunk neki . . . A Szovjetunió tapasztalatai mérhetetlenül nagyobbak a mi tapasztalatainknál, . . . a szocialista állam és társadalom, gazdaság és kultúra felépítésében."

7 "önzetlenül segítve . . . művészetükkel és tanításaikkal szárnyat adtak a magyar kultúra dolgozóinak."

the Soviet guests attended. Hundreds of thousands of people were forcefully mobilized to attend these events, and a huge machinery was responsible for the organization, including the staff of the Ministry of Public Education, the Institute of Cultural Relations, the All-Hungarian Association of Trade Unions, the Hungarian-Soviet Society, the State Security Office and, of course, the Central Committee of the Party (MNL OL P2148 5. d.). The local government never had much of a choice in selecting the guests, although it could make suggestions. Since only official contacts were permitted between Hungarians and Soviets during the period of High Stalinism in the early 1950s, the Soviet deputies never came to Budapest spontaneously and voluntarily, but only as representatives of the Soviet regime.

If vassalage is an appropriate term to define the political relations, one can use another feudal term in connection with guests and delegates: representative publicity. This Habermasian concept describes the blurring of boundaries between private and public spheres (Habermas 58-68). Applied to Eastern Europe after 1949, representative publicity refers to the establishment of a distorted communication framework in which Soviet participants aimed at representing the splendor of the Soviet Union while Hungarians were expected to show great admiration for all Soviet presentations and instructions. Therefore, it may seem that the Soviets manually controlled all domestic decisions and administrative measures in Hungarian domestic politics. As mentioned above, some evidence, however, raises doubts about this picture.

SOVIET GUESTS IN HUNGARY AND THEIR ROLE IN THE SOVIETIZATION OF MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT

Considering that the cultural delegations were often led by musicians, music certainly played an important role in public diplomacy. Soviet musicians (composers, performers) and musicologists frequently visited Hungary from 1949 onwards in order to play concerts, give presentations, or participate in local discussions, symposiums, and public debates. According to public speeches of such Soviet composers as Michail Chulaki, Kirill Molchanov, Vladimir Zacharov or Jury Milyutin, the Sovietization (i.e. the Zhadovian transformation) of classical musical life always took priority over musical entertainment and popular musical genres. However, since socialist realist musical aesthetics insisted on abandoning the ‘bourgeois’ distinction between ‘serious’ and ‘light’ music, Stalinist cultural policy was committed to the demarcation between politically ‘useful’ and ‘useless’ (or hostile) rather than ‘higher’ and ‘lower’

spheres of art. Soviet composers, whose compositions usually exemplified the relatedness of the two musical spheres, had to handle, at least in their verbal manifestations, those spheres simultaneously.[8] As we shall see below, however, the topic of popular music and classical music received unequal treatment in Soviet-Hungarian public diplomacy in the Stalinist period. Popular music was usually judged by the criteria of (socialist) high culture, and only very few Hungarian documents bear witness to an actual and properly Soviet interest in popular music.

Of those Soviet musical delegates who visited Hungary during the Stalinist period, the General Secretary of the Association of Soviet Composers, Mihail Chulaki probably made the first observation on Hungarian musical entertainment. The Hungarian musicological journal *Zenei Szemle* (Musical Review) considered Chulaki's visit in early 1949 as one of the most important musical events of post-war Hungary. Edited by committed communist musicologists after late 1948, the journal expressed great appreciation for members of the Soviet delegation who "represented the musical life of the Soviet Union, and its humanistic magnificence" ("Szovjet Kultúra Hónapja" 1).[9]

However, as the article added, "we are indebted even more [to Chulaki] for spending most of his time with us, in order to discuss all the issues of our musical life. As a result, our tasks have become so obvious and conscious that the only thing left is to act" ("Szovjet Kultúra Hónapja" 1).[10]

On 24 February 1949, Chulaki gave a talk at the Hungarian Academy of Music on post-war Soviet music. According to a public report published in the journal *Új Világ* (New World), the audience was encouraged to ask him questions. One of those questions from the audience inquired about the relationship between classical and popular music in the Soviet Union, giving Chulaki the opportunity to define the official Soviet position:

In the West, it is impossible to overcome the differences between 'serious' and 'light' [music]. Light music degenerated and became an instrument of the most inferior type of entertainment. It adapted itself to the unhealthy erotic atmosphere of pubs, night clubs and

8 See, for instance, the oeuvre of Milyutin or Alexander Novikov. The latter was also invited to Budapest to introduce his mass musical compositions in 1951.

9 "a Szovjetunió zenekultúráját, ennek a zenekultúrának a mindenkihez szóló humanista nagyszerűségét reprezentálták."

10 "[Csulakinak azonban] főleg sokat köszönhetünk, aki csaknem minden idejét velünk töltötte, átbeszélve, átvitázva zeneéletünk minden problémáját. Ezután oly világossá és tudatossá váltak feladataink, hogy most már csak meg kell oldanunk őket."

dance clubs. Moreover, serious music remained the privilege of those few who had the upper hand over the masses by their superior existential and social status.

(The reporter comments on Chulaki's statement): Contrary to this, there is no gap between light and serious music in the Soviet Union. Both of them embody the emotional experiences of people, both of them communicate intellectual contents toward great masses of people, both of them are rooted in rich folk music traditions, and they both take their nutrimental juices from these traditions. (Chulaki qtd. in Új Világ 7)[11]

This direction, however objective it may have seemed, provided little help for the practical realization of socialist realist musical entertainment. The Hungarian Working People's Party understood that they had to undertake general measures before a more comprehensive Zhdanovian program could be implemented. It is no accident that *Zenei Szemle*, which highly praised Chulaki's remarks, focused on what the Soviet deputy said about "severe and straightforward"[12] criticism and self-criticism (Chulaki 1) and a fully centralized institutional framework which would guarantee a major transformation of the Hungarian musical landscape into a version of the Soviet Union.

Besides Chulaki's visit there was another important event in 1949, namely the Budapest concerts of the Osipov Folk Ensemble, a folk orchestra that was considered to be one of the important export products of Stalinist Soviet Culture. According to contemporary reviews, Hungarian audiences enthusiastically welcomed this Soviet group at all of their concerts (Kadosa 39). Following the tour, the musicology department of the Hungarian Association of Musicians dedicated a complete review session to the visit of the Osipovs. Participants agreed that contrary to the "sloppy" performance styles of dance music and jazz musicians, the real artists of the Soviet group had the ability to raise popular

11 "Nyugaton a könnyű és komoly közötti különbség áthidalhatatlan. A könnyűzene lesüllyedt a legalacsonyabb fokú szórakozás eszközévé. Lokálok, bárok, dancingok beteg erótikus [(sic!)] világához idomult, a komolyzene pedig azoknak a kevésszámúaknak a privilégiuma lett, akiket anyagi és társadalmi helyzetük a tömeg felé emelt. (A riporter válasza): Ezzel szemben a Szovjetunióban a könnyű és komoly zene közötti szakadék ma már ismeretlen, mindkettő a nép érzésvilágát szólaltatja meg, mindkettő magas eszmei tartalmak közvetítője a széles néptömegek felé és mindkettő a gazdag népzenei hagyományok talajában gyökeredzik, és onnan szívja tápláló nedveit."

12 "őszinte, nyílt kritika."

music to the level of symphonic music, and therefore their performances served the "noble" amusement of the working people (MNL OL P2146.).

A year later in 1950, the tour of the Pyatnitsky Choir received an even warmer response by some Hungarian music critics. The ensemble was accompanied by a dance group and an orchestra of Russian folk instruments. Members of the Pyatnitsky Choir were recruited from all over the Soviet Union, representing the 'equality' and 'friendship' of the Soviet nations. As Viktor Lányi, reporter of the journal *Új Világ* stated, the audience of one of the Budapest concerts "was holding its breath" during the famous song "Steppe Only Steppe," while "it fully felt the essence of the new way of music" (Lányi 20).[13]

The international tour of Pyatnitsky indicated already a modified definition of popular music in Hungary. An article entitled "The Effect of Soviet Music," written for the Hungarian-Soviet Society, reported about commercially successful Western (i.e. American) music in the past tense and praised the proliferation of Soviet entertainment and folk music (MNL OL P2148 5. d.). Simultaneously, the Association of Hungarian Musicians invited Vladimir Zacharov, the leader and chief composer of the Pyatnitski Choir, to speak about his group's inspirations and artistic approaches at a plenary session. Responding to questions following his talk, Zacharov pointed out that the Soviet youth had been successfully weaned away from listening and dancing to jazz and Western dance music as a result of the successful propagation of folk and certain ballroom dances (MNL OL P2146 62. d.).

The Pyatnitsky Choir was also one of the important role models for musicologist Iván Vitányi. In his article "On the New Hungarian Social Dance Culture," Vitányi demanded the domestication of newly designed folk dances which could help to shape the "new socialist man" and to develop the socialist consciousness of the people (16). As he pointed out, American social dances had already been successfully suppressed in the Soviet Union, but not yet in Hungary (16-17).

Vitányi found one of his positive examples in the ball scene of the Soviet film *Kubanskie Kazaki* (Cossacks of the Kuban, 1950) while he was searching for models for new Hungarian social dances. To Vitányi's mind, the scene demonstrated the collective spirit of the people, and it expressed the joviality and happiness characterizing new social dances of the future. Vitányi emphasized the

13 Since, beginning in 1949, publishing anything that deviated from the official line was not permitted anymore, we should not attempt to infer how ideologically committed journalists were at that time. This commitment can only be clearly proven by the quantity of somebody's writings and by the nature of their verbal communication during non-public debates in the committees and departments.

importance of the already existing Hungarian dance musical initiatives which tried to imitate Soviet examples. That is why he mentioned the new state-supported Dance with Us movement, which introduced two czardas-type Hungarian dances, the so-called karikázó (round dance) and farkastánc (wolf's dance). Vitányi was not the only one in favor of these endeavors. The popular music department of the Hungarian Association of Musicians and the Association of Dancers launched a monumental joint initiative to create the choreography and accompanying tunes of these dances which were supposed to replace tango and swing in Hungary (MNL OL P2146 62. d.).

The diatribes against jazz and Western dance music initially seemed to be successful. A series of propagandistic articles from 1950 and 1952 reported that the bourgeois jazz music and partner dances were expected to cause protest and indignation among socialist people. The new audience apparently already denied "the bad taste and pornographic songs and lyrics of nonsense of English and American jazz titles": "Our youth … loves dancing, but it is fed up with the raving, worrying … dances" ("Szünjék" 9).[14] According to the official media, swing and samba were systematically popularized by the US and socialist countries had to be alert in order to prevent being infiltrated by the "poison of cosmopolitanism" ("Szünjék" 9).

In 1951, the Hungarian Working People's Party called upon every jazz and dance musician of the country to join the "musical revolution" (MNL OL XIX-I-3-n 1. d.). In the same year, the All-Hungarian Association of Trade Unions organized a music competition which aimed at struggling against cosmopolitanism ("Tánczenekaraink" 1). The Association primarily invited local bands which had participated in the World Festival of Youth and Students (WFY) in East Berlin a few months earlier. The aim was to eliminate the "artful sounds," the "cacophonic jazz-harmonies" or "distorted rhythms" (Tamássy 37-38) and to acquire the severe performing style that stays loyal to the musical message and intellectual content. The twelve bands which entered the competition, among them the groups led by Mihály Tabányi, Lajos Martony, and Péter Hajdú, were forced to compile a colorful program reflecting the "optimistic atmosphere" of the third WFY, "expressing the youthful impetus and desire for peace characteristic of young people" ("Tánczenekaraink" 1).[15] The program turned out to be

14 "Ez az új közönség . . . visszautasítja az ízléstelen, pornográf kuplékat, az angol, amerikai értelmetlen jazz-számokat." "Ifjúságunk . . . szeret táncolni, de felháborodnak az ízléstelen, testet-lelket elgyötrő . . . táncokon."

15 "fejezzék ki az ifjúság békevágyát, fiatalos lendületét, a III. VIT . . . optimista hangulatát."

colorful indeed. Contemporary Hungarian stars such as Tabányi and Martony played covers of Soviet hits, presented a cover of the official March of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, and even a version of Alexander Alexandrov's famous "Cantata about Stalin" ("Tánczenekaraink" 1).

The most important element, however, was missing, namely socialist realist-inspired Hungarian popular songs produced and performed by Hungarian musicians. Socialist realist musical discourses revealed and named only the allegedly wrong, hostile, and inadequate elements and attributes of works of art, and made only vague and contradictory references to the criteria of ideal composition. The accessibility to the broadest masses or the simplicity and clarity of form were definitely included in the list of those criteria. The requirements of ideological commitment and national/popular spirit were among the most frequent ones, too (Heller). Besides, composers and musicologists continuously proclaimed the need for the primacy of the melody since they believed that music has to imitate the intelligent and expressive human speech. As a result, they demanded linear melodies that are easy to sing and memorize. Simultaneously, they launched a campaign to promote thinking in clear and easy harmonic structures in order to avoid the "formalist cacophony" of jazz music and to create a jolly and optimistic musical atmosphere. Opinions differed regarding the implementation of new Hungarian social dances: while some composers and musicologists wanted to keep the traditional dance-rhythms (such as slow fox, waltz, polka, etc.) and integrate them into the new musical material, others advocated the design of completely new rhythms based on the peculiarities of Hungarian folk songs (MNL OL P2146 61. d.; 62. d.; 66. d.; Ignácz, "Hungarian in Form").

Similar to the lyrics of classical compositions, the ones of popular music pieces had to depict the new socialist way of life in Hungary. As the director of Hungarian Radio, István Szirmai stated at a debate session in 1950, "our youth is growing, the factory is producing, and a new type of socialist man is growing up in the factories who is dancing, loving or having fun. Therefore, dance songs have to portray the humor and playfulness of this new man" (MNL OL P2146, d. 62).[16] At the beginning, patriotic and folkish, rural topics were also welcomed. The topic of love, however, was considered dangerous and risky, as it was connected with sexuality, melancholy, or resignation. According to a 1954 press debate, these lyrics "allow for no glimmer of hope, and passion for life and

16 "nő az ifjúság, termel a gyár, a gyárban egy új típusú szocialista ember nő fel, aki táncol, szeret, szórakozik, a táncdalok az ő életétének humorát, játékát adják vissza."

work." Instead "they are training for cynicism, laxity of morals, and extravagance, as if everyone were living only in the here and now" (G. Horváth 8)."[17]

Although there was supposed to be a tacit agreement as to what "socialist content" should mean in the field of popular music, members of the Association of Musicians assumed very different viewpoints regarding the primacy of lyrics or sound. Many argued that good music depends on the preexistence of good lyrics. According to the politically most influential composer, Ferenc Szabó, ideologically committed dance music has to be based on the rhythmic, intellectual, and emotional message of the lyrics. Some of his colleagues claimed that the message and structure of music could enrich the fantasy of librettists. However, nobody doubted the view that only those popular songs could be successful in which sound and lyrics are inseparable from one another other. It is no accident that in the first years of communist rule the idea of instrumental dance music was hardly discussed.

HUNGARIAN DANCE MUSIC COMES TO TRIAL: THE CRITIQUE OF KIRILL MOLCHANOV

Beginning in late 1950, a few efforts were launched to implement communist musical ideals. The first serious test of Hungarian-produced socialist realist dance songs was an evening of the First Hungarian Musical Week on 20 November 1951 where Ilona Hollós, László Kazal and other famous singers of the time performed 25 songs accompanied by the State Radio Dance Orchestra. A few days later, on 24 November, higher local officials and foreign guests were invited to evaluate the event at a review session hosted by the Budapest Academy of Music (MNL OL P2146 61.d.). The Soviet delegation was led by Tikhon Khrennikov, President of the Association of Soviet Composers, who otherwise was known in his country not only as an ardent supporter of socialist realism (Tomoff; Heikinheimo), but also as the main censor of jazz and American dance music (Starr 180). However, Khrennikov's talk in Budapest focused exclusively on such general aspects as the dangers of formalism and cosmopolitanism, refraining from analyzing the popular musical compositions of the Hungarian Musical Week. Khrennikov appointed Kirill Molchanov in his stead to critically evaluate the conditions of socialist realist dance music in Hungary.

17 "akire hatnak, abból kiölik a jövőbe vetett hitet, az életkedvet, munkakedvet, a nemes emberi érzelmek megbecsülését és tiszteletben tartását. Cinizmusra, erkölcsi lazaságra nevelnek, szertelenségre, azon az alapon, hogy ki tudja, mi lesz holnap."

Molchanov, General Secretary of the Soviet Association, downplayed the importance of popular music in favor of program music and opera. He said, however, that supporters of socialist realism all have to be concerned with popular music, because the global hegemonic aspirations of the US and the destructive effects of cosmopolitanism are embodied in the "bourgeois" popular music of recent years (MNL OL P2146 61.d.). The Soviet deputy expressed fierce criticism about the pieces he had heard a few days before, calling them mentally empty and in want of ideas. According to him, songs which attempted to force "sensible" lyrics related to the new contemporary life into jazz schemes were even worse than their musical models (MNL OL P2146 61.d.), that is, the original jazz compositions. Molchanov inquired why Hungarian composers of popular music were not making more use of the wealth of Hungarian folk music. He reminded the audience that the Hungarian people had already created their songs and dances. In order to reflect the spirit of the people in popular music, one would only need to call Hungarian folk songs and dances in mind (MNL OL P2146 61.d.).

It is difficult to assess the impact of Molchanov's speech, again, since he echoed only the widely known basic Zhdanovian demands, without going into any theoretical or practical details. Following his exhortations, however, beginning in early 1952, the state increasingly controlled the composition and distribution of dance music in Hungary. State control manifested in regular consultation sessions about popular music and the establishment of a state-funded dance music composing course. In this course (called *tánczeneszerzői tanfolyam* in Hungarian), enthusiastic novices studied the theory of socialist realism, the history of folk music, and technical aspects of composing. At the end of the course, they had the opportunity to discuss their works with a delegated working group of the Association of Hungarian Musicians which then assisted the publishing and recording of the most valued pieces.

The politically influential composer Endre Székely first drew attention to the necessity of those consultations in Hungary. Székely regularly enjoyed the hospitality of his Soviet colleagues and had first-hand experience on how dance music composition courses were organized in the Soviet Union. He delivered his remarks at a review session on 25 January 1952, an event which was incidentally dedicated to the "morals of the Hungarian Musical Week." Several participants of the meeting agreed that Molchanov's perspicacity was disturbed by the bad amplifying and the lack of translations of the texts. Zdenkó Tamássy, the former leader of the popular music department of the Association of Hungarian Musicians, also expressed his sincere surprise about the complete lack of Soviet help (MNL OL P2146 62.d.).

Thus, Soviet instructions eventually proved futile. With very few exceptions, the "Hungarian-style" popular songs composed under the supervision of censors did not become popular. The concept of folk music-based national dance music obviously had undergone a crisis by the spring of 1953. Examining the tracklists of radio programs, live shows, and music festivals shows that the imaginary "jazz-free" new popular music scene suffered from a severe shortage of musical material to be aired. Since communists were constantly lagging behind in designing the new style, the topic of what to play and listen to at the "stage of transition" (which the communists referred to as "the interregnum"), was permanently on the agenda (MNL OL P2146 62.d.). To many, the adaptation of popular Soviet songs, such as the ones of Isaak Dunayevsky or Jury Milyutin, and their "Magyarization" seemed to be the best solution to remedy this deficiency. There were frequent clashes, however, concerning the extent to which jazz, foxtrot or tango covers of Soviet hits could serve the purposes of socialist entertainment. Pianist László Turán, member of the Radio Dance Orchestra, complained already at a conference held on 30 September 1950 that his band had been criticized by a few participants for as slight a modification as accelerating the original tempos and trying to make the converted Soviet compositions more dance-able using dotted rhythms and syncopations (MNL OL P2146 62.d.).

SOVIET DANCE MUSIC IN HUNGARY BEYOND 1953

It was under these circumstances that Jury Milyutin visited Budapest. The Stalin-prize-winning composer of operettas, dance music, and soundtracks drew attention to the ideological message of dance music compositions and the importance of intonation in his talks held at the Academy of Music in February and March 1953 ("Miljutyin" 7). It is noteworthy that Milyutin showed compliance towards those high-quality pieces which remained perfect in their socialist intellectual content, but were less nationalistic in their intonation. Still, he finally urged his Hungarian colleagues to turn their attention to the "most noble and most complicated task" of composing popular songs national in both form and content ("Miljutyin" 7).

The musicologist János Maróthy, who later became an initiator and major figure of the local political and aesthetic discussions concerning popular music, considered Milyutin's talks a fundamental inspiration. In his article "Urgent Tasks," published immediately after the visit of the Soviet delegation, Maróthy discussed what is probably the last large-scale concept of national dance music (Ignácz, "Music"), but his contribution added little that was new to the musical

discourse of social realism. The point under discussion was once more, like in the earlier Stalinist years, the importance of the so-called "Hungarian-style school," which Maróthy described as the most progressive socialist realist dance music endeavor in the country (Ignácz, "Music").

It seemed inconceivable, even in early 1953, that there could be any transformation in the Stalinist artistic approach or in the rigid system of censorship seeking to prevent cultural infiltration. Stalin's death in 1953, however, caused a dramatic political and social change in each country of the Eastern European satellite states. As a consequence, the Hungarian-Soviet Society was forced to admit its former faults, including the way in which they had idealized the Soviet Union, thus making Soviet culture virtually inaccessible to a broader audience (MNL OL P2148 4.d.).

Soviet-Hungarian relations also underwent a change because of the détente. The communication became less ritualized, and more functional with the result that questions of popular genres in public diplomacy lost relevance. The same trend was indicated by the report entitled *Proposal for the Reinforcement of Interstate Relations* (Javaslat a Nemzetközi Kapcsolatok Erősítésére) issued by the Ministry of Public Education in May 1954. The document contained important critical remarks about Soviet-Hungarian relations in the field of popular music. It observed that popular music is the only musical field where the "exchange of experiences" between Eastern European countries is still absent. The Ministry encouraged the cultural policy makers to organize a pan-European estrade festival in co-operation with Czech, Bulgarian, East German, French, Italian, Polish, and Soviet bands. This festival, however, was never realized. This document appears to be the only one questioning Soviet responsibility for the failure of renewing Hungarian popular music. None of the presentations and performances of the above-mentioned Soviet deputies were deemed to be relevant aspects of cultural exchange (MNL OL XIX-i-3-o.).

CONCLUSION

This contribution argued that political leaders and cultural elites in Hungary tried to transform popular culture by using elusive Soviet models and examples. It seems that, contrary to other fields of public life, Soviet deputies of popular music were not in all instances instruments of a "manual control" of Hungarian cultural life and musical production. They did not always manage to directly influence the popular music scene in Hungary. Therefore, their speeches need to

be treated with the utmost caution when reconstructing the history of Hungarian popular music of the early 1950s.

Even though the main intention of Chulaki, Zacharov, Molchanov or Milyutin was to hammer the Zhdanovian artistic approach into Hungarian heads, policy makers and musicians used their ideas as pretexts for Sovietizing the popular music scene on their own account and according to their own methods and plans. The reason for the relative independence of Hungarian cultural policy in this field was most probably the relative insignificance of popular music in Soviet public diplomacy. If Stalin and his comrades had declared the transformation of Hungarian popular culture a priority, Hungarian communists would have had no alternative but to be entirely at their disposal and to strictly follow Soviet instructions.

During the Stalinist period of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Sovietization of popular music, everyday culture, and leisure time in Hungary was less important than that of the economy and state machinery. The significance of Soviet interventions in Hungarian cultural policy was, however, enlarged by the Hungarian government's efforts to surpass Soviet expectations in many fields of everyday life. The very reforms in Hungarian cultural life and Soviet-Hungarian relations took place only after Soviet pressure had forced the Hungarian government to admit some of its former mistakes in June 1953. At that time, a new period of different competing conceptions began. The 'dogmatic' approach and Zhdanov's principles did not completely retreat, but the emphasis slowly shifted from technical and compositional questions to the aesthetic education of musicians and audiences as well as institutional positions and circumstances of production and distribution.

At a meeting held on 27 February 1954, lyricist József Romhányi and composer Béla Tardos spoke quite openly about the paralyzing effects of state control over the process of composing. They already considered all administrative measures or direct interventions, even the Soviet ones, risky and admitted that socialist realist musical entertainment does not gain anything from restrictions of artistic freedom anymore. From then on, the Association of Musicians and the Ministry of Public Education tried to outline only the general ideological framework, and it was the artists' and theoreticians' personal responsibility to comply with the guidelines of socialist realism in their own individual ways (MNL OL P2146 62.d.).

At the same time, the regime began to gather more information about the needs and expectations of the audience. This new direction—which brought public procurement contracts—was not much different from the cultural policy established after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The creed of this policy was

from the very beginning decent and classy entertainment and aesthetic education of the youth. It seems that these changes in Hungary brought about a collapse of the idea of *aesthetic totalitarianism*.[18]

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