

**SOVIET APPROACHES TO FOLK MUSIC
PERFORMANCE:**

Revival or Appropriation?

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Washington, D.C. 20006

TITLE VIII PROGRAM

Project Information*

Sponsoring Institution:	University of Colorado
Principal Investigator:	Laura Olson
Council Contract Number:	814-9g
Date:	September 21, 2000

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* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.

Executive summary

This paper outlines Soviet views of rural people, folklore, and folk music, and shows why folk culture was of use to the regime during the Stalin period. During the 1930s new definitions of the folk allowed folklore to be used widely for the promotion of a myth of a rural idyll; to ideologically re-educate the peasantry; and to boost patriotism, as well as to provide a context for communal activity.

Furthermore, since folklore was redefined as the creative expression of the masses, and since it was equated with literary creation, it became permissible for individuals to create it. A system was set up under which folklore activities would be practiced by the masses as a hobby; these amateurs would imitate the supposedly beautiful and tasteful stage presentation of folk culture created by professionals.

Soviet rhetoric strongly advocated preservation of Russian folk culture, and Soviet policy devoted increasing funds to the education and promotion of folk music and dance. But despite the heavy stress on the necessity to preserve Russian traditions, there was no official policy of revival of folk culture. On the contrary, the Soviet approach to folklore followed the pattern set by the national school of music in the nineteenth century, which appropriated folk melodies in order to display national culture on stage and promulgated the view that Western classical music was the finest form in which to situate the Russian folk idiom. Additionally, the Soviet style of folklore presentation took much from the late nineteenth-century revivalist choruses and orchestras, which incorporated some of the principles of classical music into the practice of folk music and established the standards for presenting folk music to urban audiences.

Because of the negative views of the peasant that prevailed after the 1917 revolution, folklore was largely rejected by Bolshevik cultural ideologists, or it was used for specific purposes. For example, folklore was used as propaganda in the battle against Christianity. Christian holidays were explained to be versions of pagan rituals: Christ's birth was explained away as a myth about the rebirth of the sun after winter.¹ Satirical stories about clergy were used by the Soviets in anti-religious propaganda.²

As previously, folklorists went into the Russian villages to collect folklore, but they were increasingly forced not just to be collectors, but to function as propagandists of the new Soviet viewpoint. This viewpoint centered on critique of the Tsarist regime and promotion of new technology. The folklorists' educational role was potentially important since the government possessed very few coherent ways of reaching the peasant population. Folklorists could educate local teachers and cultural workers, and in this way gain a larger influence on local populations. However, the government's prejudice against the Russian peasantry was so strong as to prevent it from taking full advantage of the folklorists' potential intermediary role.³

It was not until 1934 that Russian folklore began to interest the regime. At this time Stalin proclaimed that the country had "'divested itself of everything backward and medieval' and become an industrialized society based on a solid socialist foundation."⁴ In reality, this was far from the truth.⁵ Nonetheless, according to official rhetoric, socialism had been achieved and class no longer existed as a legitimate category.

Research for this paper was conducted in Moscow and other Russian cities and villages in 1998-99. I am grateful to the National Council for East European and Eurasian Research, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, and the University of Colorado, which funded the field research; and the Social Science Research Council, which provided fellowship support.

¹ Helmut Altrichter, "Insoluble Conflicts: Village Life Between Revolution and Collectivization," *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 201.

² Oinas and Stephen Soudakoff, eds. "Introduction," *The Study of Russian Folklore* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 4.

³ Dana Prescott Howell, *The Development of Soviet Folkloristics* (New York: Garland, 1992), 61-62, 70, 74.

⁴ I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, (Moscow: Politizdat, 1952), 13: 306, 309, quoted in Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 442.

⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 262-63.

One remnant of the pre-socialist days was allowed to remain – that was nationality, because it represented only “form” (as in Stalin’s slogan “national in form, socialist in content”), which was now to be applied to the new arts doctrine of socialist realism.⁶ Socialism now incorporated the notion of the “brotherhood of the peoples,” the idea that all (except the Russians) were equal. The Soviet government invested enormous time and energy in the production of patriotism and national consciousness among its citizens. This was a watershed time for Russian nationality: now, rather than being a neutral background to set off the other nationalities, Russian nationality emerged as an ethnic group in itself.⁷ In fact, Russian now stepped forward as the dominant nationality – more “equal” than all the rest.

For the first time Russian language was instituted as a second-language in all non-Russian schools, a patriotic version of Russian history began to be taught in schools, patriotic Russian historical novels, operas and films became popular, and nineteenth-century Russian authors were celebrated. The change seems to have been initiated partly because the country was not reproducing enough labor to fulfill the demands of increasing industrialization. Stalin sought a return to family values, including patriotism with its familial terms “*rodina*” (motherland) and “*otechestvo*” (fatherland), as an antidote to a falling birth rate and a rise in juvenile delinquency. Another reason for the change was the threat of fascism in Europe and the possibility of war.⁸ Indeed, during the war and the post-war years, the promotion of Russian nationality intensified. It became a commonplace that it was the Russian people’s inherent patriotism, courage, optimism, and strength that allowed them to defeat the fascists during World War II.⁹

The study, performance, and use of Russian folklore was enormously affected by this change. Whereas prior to 1934 folklorists received little popular attention for their work on Russian material, and

⁶ Greg Castillo, “Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and the National Question,” *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 100.

⁷ Slezkine, 442-43.

⁸ Slezkine, 443; see also John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 10-12.

⁹ For examples of this view in relation to folk music see articles such as B. Asaf’ev, “O russkoi pesennosti,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 3 (1948): 22-30; and V. Surin, “Vydaishchiisia russkii khor,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 5-6 (1946): 32-36.

towards the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, had had difficulty publishing their work, after 1934 songbooks and folk-tale collections were widely popularized, and articles about folklore were published in newspapers and major literary journals.¹⁰ Folk music as entertainment and as amateur activity had been allowed prior to 1928, but was banned or criticized during the 1928-34 period. After 1934, however, folk choirs and orchestras were actively encouraged by the leadership.¹¹ In almost all aspects of Soviet culture, rural life, rural culture, and rural people became important topics that were no longer to be ignored or belittled.

A new definition of the folk and folklore

In many aspects of Soviet culture, from ornaments on buildings to music on the radio, positive attention toward the Russian peasant and Russian folk culture served the function of cultivating patriotism. But the images of the peasants and the types of folklore were now different than they had been previously. In fact, what happened was that the conception of “folk” (used as a modifier; Russ. *narodnyi*) changed. Since the official policy was that the peasants of the Soviet Union had now been transformed into agricultural workers, and that all workers, industrial and agricultural, were equally valuable, it followed that the term “*narodnyi*” now referred to all the people, and would be best translated as “people’s” or “popular” rather than “folk.” Thus, the term “*narodnaia muzyka*” ceased in the 1930s to mean folk music, and now meant the music of the people, that is, “any kind of broad-based popular music.”¹²

The definition of folklore changed after 1934 as well. Folklore was said to be the orally transmitted lore of the working masses. It was acknowledged that because of its origin and its close association with the masses, folklore had a potentially great role to play in disseminating party doctrine. Maxim Gorky’s remarks at the First Congress of Soviet Writers were crucial in redefining folklore: he

¹⁰ Howell, 75, 312, 319.

¹¹ Susannah Lockwood Smith, “Soviet Arts Policy, Folk Music, and National Identity: The Piatnitskii State Russian Folk Choir, 1927-45,” Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1997, 66.

¹² Smith, 126.

linked folklore with literature and with the doctrine of socialist realism. Just as socialist realism would be grounded in reality yet would provide heroic models for others to emulate, so folklore provided heroes who were both ordinary people and also possessed extraordinary strengths.

After this speech, folklorists began to reinterpret traditional Russian epics (*byliny*) in the light of socialist realism. Frank Miller writes:

They credited the heroes of the ancient *byliny* with the ideas and values of contemporary man. Their ‘high cultural level and their respect for science, art, and freedom of feeling’ were traits that the people were to emulate. The heroes’ love for their native land and their unrestrained service to it, especially against foreign invaders, were constantly emphasized.¹³

With folklore a tool to increase patriotism and to draw on the new notion of a “popular” culture, it needed to be “edited” in order to suit the context of a socialist society. Thus, a particular interpretation of folklore was designed, which emphasized the struggle of the peasants prior to the revolution, and their current status as workers and members of modern Soviet society. Unacceptable types of folklore included genres deemed part of bourgeois society, such as “cruel romances” (songs from the late nineteenth century which had soap-opera-like plots) and criminal songs; genres that reflected a pagan or superstitious world-view, such as ritual folklore, erotic folklore, and incantations; and folklore reflecting a Christian world-view, such as Christian ritual songs and spiritual songs.¹⁴

As during the 1920s, desirable genres were songs and stories that criticized aspects of pre-revolutionary Russia. Now, however, it was not enough for folklore to criticize what had been; it also had to extol what currently was: the revolution, mechanization, the party leadership. Folklorists began to search for such songs, stories, and epics. They found some in relatively new genres such as the song genre of *chastushki*, which were witty limericks about topical subjects.

Most genres of folklore, however, did not reflect new Soviet life as the authorities wanted it depicted. Folklore, as it had been defined in Europe since the nineteenth century, was the traditional oral

¹³ Miller, 7-10.

¹⁴ Elena Minyonok, interview with author, Moscow, 16 November 1998; see also Felix J. Oinas, “The Political Uses and Themes of Folklore in the Soviet Union,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 12, no. 2/3 (1975): 159.

lore of illiterate country folk, passed down through the generations; thus it reflected a way of life that was ritualistic, embodied a pagan or Christ world-view, and revolved around the agricultural calendar. The Soviet redefinition of folklore did not radically change this view of folklore, inherited from the Romantics: Soviet scholars kept the focus on the inherited traditions of rural people, and did not fully include urban folklore.¹⁵ To be sure, they made much of certain urban music: the songs of protest of the late nineteenth century and *chastushki*. However, much of urban folklore – the songs of bars and cabarets, criminals’ songs and lore, jokes, myths and stories of the workplace and the street – included content that was considered decadent, irreverent, or politically dangerous by the Soviet regime.

Because large parts of these genres of folklore were not to be included, then, it remained to *reinvent* rural folklore. Since folklore was now redefined as the creative expression of the toiling masses, and since it was equated with literary creation, it became permissible for individuals to create it. After all, if the new creators were from the masses, then folklore was “theirs,” and anything they created was potentially “folklore.” If the new creators were not from the masses, they still could create in a style that would be acceptable to the masses.

Thus, beginning during the Stalin period, both professional and amateur composers were encouraged to create new songs in the folk style. Professional composers would “add voices” to (i.e. harmonize) folk melodies, would use folk texts for new compositions, or would make up text, melody, and accompaniment “in the folk style.” Most often, amateur composers in villages and small towns simply set new texts to old melodies. Rural tellers of folktales and epic tales were encouraged and helped to create new texts glorifying aspects of the government or leaders.

As part of their “ideological reeducation,” radios were installed in the homes of folk tellers and singers, newspapers were sent to them, and folklorists were sent out to work one-on-one with them. Trips were arranged for folk singers to be brought to Moscow and Leningrad, so they could acquaint themselves with developments in culture and politics. The results were epic folksongs lauding

¹⁵ Feodosii Rubtsov also makes this point, criticizing the Soviet approach to folklore. See “Russkie narodnye khory i psevdonarodnye pesni,” *Stat’i po muzykal’nomu fol’kloru* (Moscow, 1973; first published 1965), 184.

technological progress, party heroes and enemies, and the military might of the Russian people. The settings of such texts included the Soviet “Potemkin village,” the prosperous and happy collective farm. These songs were published in collections of songs and folk poetry, in “thick journals,” and in newspapers.¹⁶

Because folk culture was being tailored specifically for use in mainstream culture, the official Soviet approach to folklore was not one of revival but of appropriation. Both approaches are strategies that the intelligentsia have historically used to underline their *connection* to the rural people. The appropriative impulse, in which elements of folk culture are used in urban “high” culture, was the main approach used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and also during the Soviet period.

Appropriating usually involves “quoting” of an element of earlier culture or folk culture with the aim of enriching the work in which the “quote” is inserted – usually, with the aim of making the piece seem more “national” in character. By contrast, folk revival is a movement in which intellectuals cultivate a conscious interest in the traditional culture of Russian rural dwellers, and devote themselves to its study and dissemination.

The Soviet project – not only in its relation to folklore but in respect to all other pre-revolutionary art traditions – was to accumulate that which was deemed to be useful for the new society (or in the utopian vision of the new society) and use it for propagandistic and educational purposes. Curiously, the Soviet approach to folklore has this pedagogical thrust in common with folk revival movements. But while revival movements wish to spread the word about ancient traditions and to encourage their continuance, the Soviet cultural policy-makers did not. Instead, they wished to *adapt* certain elements of ancient traditions to fit a specific political agenda. Like the national school of composers in the late nineteenth century, which advocated using folk songs in opera in order to give pieces Russian flavor, Soviet policy promoted the use of folk and folk-like songs in settings ranging from

¹⁶ Oinas, 158-169; for a detailed treatment see Frank J. Miller, *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudofolklore of the Stalin Era* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), 3-19.

amateurs in villages to professionals in cities. The aim was to create a sense of community and national pride.

Under the Soviet definition of folklore, “authenticity” took on a different character. Prior to World War II, there was no rhetorical push for authenticity. Instead, the boundaries of what was being considered folklore were widening; more and more newly composed material was being held up as prime examples of “folklore.” But this new definition went against what scholars had heretofore considered to be essential elements of folklore. For example, it was no longer truly oral: as Miller points out, many of these songs were researched in advance and either written down or specifically worked on by their composers over a certain period of time.

In fact, these folk texts and songs have been dubbed “fakelore” or “pseudofolklore” because of their deliberate creation for political ends and because in many cases they were not even truly the expressions of the people to whom they were ascribed. Folklorists attempted to make the folklore they ostensibly “collected” more aesthetically appealing, more true to “reality,” more readily accessible to anyone speaking standard literary Russian, and more ideologically correct.¹⁷ Their work characterizes the approach to folklore during the *entire* Soviet period (during and after Stalin) in general. The Soviet brand of folklore became bleached of its particularity and its local flavor, and lost its connection to both the natural world and the spiritual world (which might include both Christian and pagan /supernatural bases). Miller writes: “the goal of Soviet folkloristics from the time of Stalin’s death through the 1980s remained essentially what it was in the 1930s: the promotion of works by folk performers and collectives that express the joy and optimism of Soviet life and loyalty to the country, Lenin, and the Communist party.”¹⁸

The Soviet version of folklore had a very delicate job to do throughout the Soviet years. It had to navigate the difficult space between the obligatory promotion of the glorious socialist present and future – which demanded delineating the present from the oppressive Tsarist past – and the equally important

¹⁷ For an example, see Viktorin Popov’s commentary in Iu. M. Sokolov, *Russian Folklore*, trans. Catherine Ruth Smith (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1966), 677, quoted in Miller, 21.

embracing of the legacy of the national culture. It is instructive to look at how Soviet practitioners and theorists of folklore achieved this. The duality comes into sharpest focus in the post-World War II period, since the official patriotism campaign of this time caused writing about folklore to achieve wide popular distribution. Here the rejection of the past and emphasis of the present and future exists alongside very strong support for Russian national culture and repudiation of the West. Writers finessed this duality in formulations such as the following: “We stand for the revealing and development of national form in music. The road to this lies through the cultivation of that which is authentically distinctive and valuable, and the sifting out of that which is foreign and obsolete”¹⁹ These sentences show how Soviet theorists learned to define as obsolete or foreign anything within the tradition that did not fit ideologically, and to promote the rest as the desired heritage. The word “authentic” is used, but it is implied that authenticity will be used to define that which is considered ideologically proper.

Another writer, in a 1946 article on the Piatnitsky chorus, employs two key words, used throughout the Soviet period: to preserve [*sokhraniat'*] and to create [*sozdat'*]. In the article these concepts are used to refer to the folk chorus's good qualities: the chorus *preserves* what was good from the olden days and also *creates* something new. That is, the chorus engages in the *tradition* of singing for which Russians are said to be famous, and manages to convey the *mood* of the typical Russian folk song and some of its most obvious features, without being limited by actual songs sung in olden days, their meaning or their traditional place in the village life. Some of the ancient folk songs that were in the original repertoire of the chorus are kept, but new songs about the new life under the Soviets are added. According to the article, these songs extend and enrich the tradition.²⁰ This article nicely walks the Soviet line between throwing out the past and glorifying the present and future, and “preserving” what is now interpreted to be elements of “the national tradition.”

¹⁸ Miller, 107.

¹⁹ V. Vinogradov, A. Grigor'ev, “Za dal'neishii pod'em natsional'nykh muzykal'nykh kul'tur!” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 4 (1948): 41.

²⁰ V. Surin, “Vydaishchiisia russkii khor,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 5-6 (1946): 34.

In this rhetorical line claims to preserve the spirit of the past while creating new content that suits the new ideology. In reality, one cannot preserve the spirit of the past in this fashion, because the spirit is contained in the uses to which folklore was put. In the Soviet version of folklore, there are new uses, which revolve around glorifying a state-sponsored ideology. The old functions of folklore included: connection with the natural world; connection with a spiritual world which may be based in Christianity or paganism; maintenance of a moral view; creation and maintenance of community; creation of order in community; and expression of individual creativity. By contrast, in the society envisioned and created by Soviet leaders, most of the functions named above are obsolete. A connection with the natural world through deification and supernatural understanding is no longer needed, since the world is now known to be based upon rational, mathematical models; the natural world is harnessed by engineering to serve human goals. Tractors are to be celebrated, not wood-nymphs or sacred springs.

New holidays are created to encourage celebration, but these exist to support the new ideology. In the new versions of old holidays, religious and superstitious rituals are discarded or converted into secular ones, and new content is provided to link the holiday to the building of Socialism.²¹ To be sure, the celebration of a new holiday like Harvest Holiday would involve performances by folk choruses. But these performances would not build community the way former ritual songs would, where everyone in the village formed a singing procession; they would not teach respect for elders and transmission of tradition by having younger people learn important songs and ritual behaviors from elders. Instead, the folk singing groups would appear on a stage as part of an official ceremony. They would be physically separated from the passive audience, and presented as part of a state-sponsored hierarchical system, in which those who are active in promoting the system receive awards and recognition, while others are exhorted to support and encourage their endeavors toward building the utopian socialist society.

²¹ For a discussion of holidays, see Genevra Gerhart, *The Russian's World: Life and Language* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 109. On newly created holidays, see also Rosalinde Sartorti, "Stalinism and Carnival: Organisation and Aesthetics of Political Holidays," *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. Hans Gunther (NY: St. Martins Press, 1990), 3-44.

In Soviet official culture, the spiritual world in general is viewed as being detrimental to the rational approach to life. It is viewed exclusively in terms of Marx's "opium of the masses" formulation, in which religion and spirituality existed to numb the pain brought on by oppression. Thus, this aspect of folklore must be negated or downplayed. Folklore is not needed to convey a moral view, since that is now said to be dictated by laws and the Party. Indeed, the new morals explicitly deny or repudiate certain impulses which had been expressed symbolically by folklore, such as sexual urges (contained in erotic folk tales and songs) and violence (reflected in ritual community brawls).

In the new order, community is created and maintained through official organizations such as the Party and its organs (Komsomol), work-place-based organizations, sports, and do-it-yourself artistic activity, all of which are carefully controlled for the content of their activities. The need for life cycle rituals is recognized and these continue to be important, but now they are given Party-dictated content: for example, weddings take place in a government office, and the couple are pronounced man and wife by the authority of the state. Although relatives, in-laws, and the community may participate, they do not have set roles in this new ritual, as they did in the old ritual. New social hierarchies are dictated and are based upon roles in state-sponsored organizations. Expression of individual creativity is encouraged in officially organized do-it-yourself groups.

Folklore still has a function in the Soviet society of the 1930s to 1980s, but that function has changed. Folklore now provides content for collective artistic activity in the fields of singing, instrument playing, dancing, and crafts. It is primarily a hobby, and its content is controlled and redefined along the lines we have described. Folklore now primarily provides an arena for propaganda of Party views of Russian history and culture and Party ideology. As an arena for propaganda, folklore is effective since it is oral and thus remembered, and is viewed as belonging to "the people." Finally, it provides a way of accessing national culture and tradition, which is proclaimed to be important under the Party's "Friendship of the Peoples" concept.

Folklore as hobby

Starting in the 1930s, folk culture was heavily promoted by the government as a hobby for people of all ages. It was part of a program spanning all the arts, called “amateur artistic activity” (*khudozhestvennaia samodeiatel’nost’*). Soviet citizens were encouraged to involve themselves in the creation of art, thus demonstrating that each individual was fully self-actualized and active in the work of building the ideal society.²² This activity would also demonstrate the prowess of the Soviet people: not only could they build a successful, industrialized socialist society, they also excelled at sports and the arts. The message in the government’s program, which could also be seen in films and novels of the time, was that everyone could sing, compose music, write novels and poetry, act and dance. Soviet men and women were cultured and cultivated.

Of course, from a practical point of view, the campaign to get involved in amateur artistic activity also was meant to give people something productive to do during their leisure time, and involve them in group activities to enhance the feeling of belonging to a great nation-wide collective. In fact, the word used to describe these groups was “collective” (*kollektiv*). Finally, and most significantly from the government’s point of view, the activities were meant to re-educate the masses in communist ways of thinking, to “fight the capitalist ‘birth-marks’ in people’s consciousness.”²³ Of course, in order to do this, the activities had to have not only ideologically *correct* content, but content that would *actively* teach communist ideas. This is why there was a widespread and constant call for *new* songs and plays for amateur artistic activity. For example, club leaders were looking for material that would not only not mention religion, but would attack it as being old-fashioned, superstitious and ignorant.²⁴

The movement had a mass character. By 1940, there were two million participants in art clubs in the USSR. The performing arts were quite popular: theater and dance groups, choruses, bands, and

²² Smith, 160.

²³ Genrikh Bruk, “Nastoiashchee i budushchee muzykal’noi samodeiatel’nosti,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 1 (1941): 71.

²⁴ See, for example, such articles as I. Pronin, “Zadachi antipaskhal’noi kampanii,” *Klub i revoliutsiia*, no. 6 (1930), 7-9; I. B., “Na bor’bu s zakoukami religii,” *Klub i revoliutsiia*, no. 1 (1930): 44-47; and S. Khudiakov, “Rasvernem po-bol’shevistski antireligioznuiu propagandu,” *Klub* no. 4 (1933), 14-15.

orchestras were established at factories and collective farms. Music was proclaimed the “most popular” of the types of amateur artistic activity.²⁵ It reached this status partly because of the efforts of the government, which poured considerable energy into the “development of musical culture.” Choral singing was singled out because it was seen as the best way to attract masses to music.²⁶ It was a collective activity that could be done by any number of people simultaneously, without much special training.²⁷

Choruses, bands and orchestras were founded at factories, kolkhozes, schools, and institutions. Regional and national competitions, called *olympiady* and *smotry*, were held to encourage such activity. At the yearly musical Olympiads in Leningrad from 1927-1937, the number of participants was said to reach 10,000. Competitions nationwide reached 40,000-50,000. The mass quality of the movement was emphasized by events such as the “multi-national chorus and orchestra” composed of several tens of thousands of participants at the 1932 Moscow Olympiad.²⁸

In professional musical journals, choruses were exhorted to perform more folk music.²⁹ Professional folk choirs like the Army Ensemble and the Piatnitsky Choir were held up as models to the amateur choirs.³⁰ It was difficult for the amateur choirs to imitate the professional ones – after all, they lacked the musical training, the highly schooled conductors, the time, and the resources. Instead, they had directors who had finished the equivalent of a high school or vocational school (often a “cultural-enlightenment school” [*kul'turno-prosvetitel'aia shkola*], or a music high school [*muzykal'noe uchilishche*]). This person received a salary from the state for his or her work promoting amateur culture.

The ensembles obtained new Soviet songs and approved folk songs from sheet music or from the pages of special magazines for cultural workers. The folk songs published and composed for broad use at

²⁵ “Samodeiatel'nost' muzykal'naia,” *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopedia* (Moscow, 1926-47) 50:181.

²⁶ B. Tevlin, “Neskol'ko replik,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 12 (1965): 123.

²⁷ A. Lenskii, “Pogovorim nachistotu,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 12 (1965): 120.

²⁸ “Samodeiatel'nost' muzykal'naia,” 181.

²⁹ Smith, 133.

³⁰ Smith, 152.

this time were devoid of characteristics of local folk music.³¹ The folk-singing groups who used this material had identical costumes, made at factories set up specifically to mass-produce Russian folk costumes for stage use. Instruments were similarly mass-produced, and were of notoriously poor quality.³² The purchase of such costumes and instruments was funded by the sponsoring kolkhoz or town cultural budget.

Such a chorus or orchestra would perform at all local holiday events, held in the village “club” (*klub*) or House of Culture or the town Palace of Culture, or outside in the town or village square. Children’s groups rehearsed and performed at the Palace of Pioneers. Much money was poured into the construction of these buildings, and their significance for village and small town life can be seen in their elaborate design and the variety of activities they typically housed.³³ The club was supposed to function as the center of the new socialist cultural life, and to represent the notion of people living communally.³⁴

The campaign to have folk culture performed on a mass scale with quasi-professional polish was largely successful – the mode of presentation of Russian musical folklore became more and more widespread and unified. As of 1962, there were nine professional folk choruses in the RFSFR, and many more non-professional ones; hundreds of thousands of people participated in amateur Russian folk choruses.³⁵ The folk chorus way of presenting folklore on stage became so standard that even in the late 1990s, when the state no longer poured resources into the folk choruses, the majority of amateur folk ensembles, including village and children’s ensembles, still copied several of their stylistic aspects.³⁶

Professional folklore performance during 1930s-40s

³¹ For an example, see S. Bugoslavskii, Ivan Shishov, *Russkaia narodnaia pesnia*, (Moscow: 1936), 5.

³² “Eshche raz o narodnykh instrumentakh,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 10 (1965): 107-108.

³³ For a description of such a House of Culture, see Z. Golubchina, “Pervyi god,” *Kul’turno-prostetitel’naia rabota*, no. 1 (1965): 13.

³⁴ See I. Ranish, “Za obshchestvennyi domashnyi ochag,” *Kul’turno-prostetitel’naia rabota*, no. 3 (1965): 24.

³⁵ A. Koposov, “O russkikh narodnykh khorakh,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 4 (1962):21

³⁶ Like the state choruses, participants in these 1990s amateur ensembles would appear in stylized costumes, sing in a mannered way, use smaller versions of folk orchestras for accompaniment, and convey an optimistic, rousing feeling to their audiences.

In the late 1930s, with folklore deemed useful as a propaganda tool and as a device that could unify the people of the Soviet Union, it is not surprising that the government cultivated folklore performance in the form of organized professional music-making. Folklore was not only performed in local concerts, it was also broadcast on the radio, distributed on records, and taught in schools. Performers from villages were invited to Moscow to meet with folklorists, attend conferences, perform on stage, and help compose new songs; their work was published in newspapers and magazines.³⁷ Former amateurs became professional singers and writers.

It was perhaps paradoxical that the widespread Soviet program called “amateur artistic activity” was also part of the push towards professionalism. As a reviewer of the 1948 All-Union Review of Kolkhoz Musical Amateur Activity stated, many of those performing “approached the level of professionals.”³⁸ Indeed, amateurs were becoming professionals. The singers of folk epics who had been brought to Moscow to meet with folklorists were now made members of the Writers’ Union. That is, although they had heretofore been “informants” for folklorists’ ethnographic studies, now they were professional writers themselves.³⁹ Professional folk choruses, orchestras, and dance groups recruited their new members from amateur groups.⁴⁰

Very popular on radio and in live performance was the Piatnitskii Peasant Choir, which was started in 1911 as a group of peasants singing traditional ritual and agricultural calendar songs. In 1936 it received a new image that suited the government’s policy on folk art, and the choir became a heavily-promoted professional group singing newly composed works about Soviet life. To reflect the new way that the government chose to view the choir’s identity, the word “peasant” in the choir’s former name was removed, and the choir was renamed the Piatnitskii Russian Folk/Popular [*Narodnyi*] Choir.⁴¹ The chorus also changed its image; previously the members had not read music and had sung in an improvisational

³⁷ Miller, 11-13. Regarding one instance of villagers being brought to Moscow to perform on stage, see L. Kulakovskii, “Tri poezdki v Dorozhevo,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 8 (1956): 73-82.

³⁸ V. Vinogradov, “Istochnik tvorcheskogo vdokhnoveniia,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 2 (1948): 91.

³⁹ Miller, 19.

⁴⁰ The Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble is an example. See “Samodeiatel’nost’ muzykal’naia,” 181.

⁴¹ Smith, 127-28.

style; now, they were forced to learn to read music and their right to improvise was taken away.⁴² They were taught diction and to sing on pitch and with uniform vocal quality.⁴³

Starting in the 1930s, the chorus's repertoire gradually changed from unarranged village traditional songs sung unaccompanied, to music composed in the folk idiom especially for the chorus. The chorus's new repertoire included many song and dance numbers accompanied by a large folk orchestra. Separate ensembles were kept for the chorus, orchestra, and dance ensemble. Whereas the chorus started as 20-30 people, by 1946 it consisted of 200 performers in the vocal, dance, and orchestral groups and its "studio," which prepared new cadres.⁴⁴ The chorus was now modeled after the music-making of a Western classical professional group rather than a Russian village ensemble.

The general goal of changes such as these was to create a new Soviet national identity, one that united everyone, worker and peasant, bureaucrat and intelligentsia, under the archetypal image of the ideal Soviet citizen.⁴⁵ A 1946 article boasted that the group's new leaders, Zakharov and Kaz'min, "noticeably broadened and enriched the performing style of the chorus. In the never-ending variety of northern, Volga, Voronezh, Smolensk, and other songs they were able to find the pan-Russian [*obshcherusskii*] principle uniting all these songs, and to use that principle as the basis of all their creative work."⁴⁶ Linked to the idea of the chorus's pan-Russian character was the notion that to reflect specific local dialects would be backwards and vulgar, while to sing in standard literary Russian would make the chorus accessible to all. Similarly, the chorus was said to reflect the Russian national character with its "depth of soul, boldness, sweep, sharpness of feeling."⁴⁷ Another author wrote that the chorus's popularity was understandable because the listeners "recognize themselves, their thoughts and feelings in Russian song."⁴⁸ That is, the chorus became a representation of the New Soviet Man and Woman, the utopian *everyman* who would be cultured, moral, upright, and talented. The professional artists could

⁴² Smith, 123.

⁴³ V. Poponov, *Orkestr khora imeni Piatnitskogo* (Moscow, 1979), 70

⁴⁴ Surin, 34.

⁴⁵ Smith, 120

⁴⁶ Surin, 35.

⁴⁷ A. Zhivtsov, "Gosudarstvennyi russkii narodnyi khor im. Piatnitskogo," *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 2 (1948): 88.

best represent this utopian view, since they were well-trained, good at what they did, and their appearances on stage could convey the obligatory optimism and perfection of the New Man and Woman.

In viewing the performances of the Russian professional folk choruses, one is struck by the size, the separation of duties, and the costumes: these were large choruses with separate orchestras and dance ensembles, who appeared in stylized, identical costumes, sang and played mostly arranged music, and performed choreographed dance numbers. I suspect that part of their popularity had to do with the sheer vocal power of their large size (often the chorus alone consisted of more than 50 people), their professionalism (they sang, played and danced their parts “cleanly” – for example, they sang with unified vocal placement, vowel matching and pitch accuracy), and their emotional expressiveness (they made liberal use of musical “dynamics” and theatrical production).

The choruses were widely promoted by the Soviet cultural network because they propagandized Soviet values, which one Soviet-era study of the state folk chorus lists as: “beauty,” “youth,” “strength,” “skill,” “labor,” and “love of the Motherland, the Communist party, and the people.”⁴⁹ Thus, they were meant to represent the Soviet Union itself – or at least, its mythic image. With their size, they were a model of mass participation in culture; with their separation of duties, where everyone is an “expert” at some aspect of performance, they represented professionalism; and with their uniformity and precision, they represented discipline. The happy expressions on the faces of the performers represented optimism.

Their singing and dancing, like the Russian opera and ballet, featured elements rendered in precise unison by the entire group, as well as bursts of energetic solo work. In singing, the spotlight was on female soloists; in dance, it was male dancers who “showed off” in this fashion. In this way, the choruses represented both collectivity and individual prowess – an important combination especially in the Stalin period, when individuals were encouraged to excel beyond believable measure in the context of the Stakhanovite movement. The exaggeratedly athletic nature of the dances – especially the solo male parts – emphasized energy, strength and youth, and a certain bravery or daring.

⁴⁸ Surin, 32.

⁴⁹ G. G. Soboleva, *Sovremennyi russkii narodnyi khor* (Moscow, 1978), 45.

Professionalism

The push for professionalism in the arts came about because of the Central Committee's resolution of 1932, which abolished the many proletarian literary and artistic organizations and established single unions for each of the arts. In so doing, the resolution "extended a culture of professionalization in arts activity."⁵⁰ Standards were established to define professionalism; in music, the ability to read Western musical notation was deemed by the union to be a minimum requirement of a professional musician.⁵¹ Professionalism was a corollary of the general move towards industrialization of Soviet society: the new workers needed to be properly trained in order to advance the goals of the planned economy. There was a large-scale push towards technical education.⁵²

In music, what constituted a professional was defined largely by education. The network of educational institutions of all levels was developed intensively. A Western observer noted that the numbers of serious music students in the Soviet Union by the late 1960s were "staggering." For example, there were 2,219 children's elementary music schools (there had been 40 in Tsarist Russia), 187 intermediate music schools (including 11-year music schools and technical music institutes), 24 college-level conservatories, and 1,000 evening music schools (the latter with enrollment of about 150,000).⁵³

One of the aims of this mass musical education with a pyramid structure, was to identify exceptionally talented people at a young age and channel them into specialized elementary, intermediate, and higher education. The notion of talent was based upon a student's performance in examinations and

⁵⁰ Smith, 101; see also Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia. Enlarged Edition, 1917-1981*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 109-110.

⁵¹ Smith, 101.

⁵² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 149-182, cited in Smith, 102.

⁵³ Schwarz, 396. See also Mayo Bryce, *Fine Arts Education in the Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1963), 28-31.

auditions.⁵⁴ As a result, standards were often high. Furthermore, the emphasis on education made it possible to make the qualifications necessary to be a musician (or artist, or writer – since this was true of all the arts) uniform throughout the Soviet Union.

In folk music, professionalism continued to be defined throughout the Stalin period and into the Brezhnev period, as new training and educational programs were opened, refined, and tailored to the growing need for leaders of amateur folk ensembles, teachers of folk music, and performers in professional folk choruses and orchestras. Starting in the 1930s, most music schools at the elementary, high school, and college level had a major in folk instruments; these programs trained musicians to perform in or conduct folk orchestras and ensembles, and to teach folk instruments in clubs and schools.⁵⁵ Those majoring in folk dance took a full curriculum from age 12 to 17 that prepared dancers for national dance ensembles or teaching careers.⁵⁶

For future folk singers and teachers, the situation was more complicated: at both the high school and conservatory level, those interested in folk music careers studied alongside academic singers. All vocal students had to learn to perform classical music as well as folk music.⁵⁷ Similarly, those who wished to conduct folk choirs completed a degree in directing that prepared them for conducting

⁵⁴ M. Anastasiev, "Music Education in the U.S.S.R.," *Musical America* (February, 1959), 21, cited in Norman Haltmeyer, "A Study of Soviet Music Education" (M.A. thesis, State College of Iowa, 1964), 44. The instruments taught were accordion, domra, and balalaika; at the high school level they included mandolin as well, while at the conservatory level other instruments were taught according to the local musical traditions in the republic where the conservatory was located. See Daniel Robert Remeta, "Music Education in the USSR" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1974), 187, 237.

⁵⁵ In Soviet music schools, students were grouped in majors already at the elementary school level, and each major had a different program of study. See Bryce, 28. The Soviet music curriculum remained much the same from 1934 until the late 1980s, when Dmitri Kabalevskii's new curriculum was introduced. See Mary Elizabeth McCaskill, "A Comparative Study of General Music Education Curricula in Elementary Schools of the United States of America and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic" (Ph.D. diss., Lexington, University of Kentucky, 1989), 307; and Remeta, 39.

⁵⁶ Bryce, 35.

⁵⁷ At the high school level, singers took a total of 40 hours in folk music during their four year program. They had to give a final solo recital at which they performed two opera arias (one by a Russian composer, the other by a foreign composer), two romances, one folk song, and a composition by a Soviet composer. At the conservatory level, students could choose the specialty of Opera Singer, Chamber Artist, or Teacher. They did not have special classes in folk music, but did spend 157 hours on the history of music in the USSR. The final recital for those in the Chamber Artist specialty had to contain Russian folk songs, Russian and foreign classical songs and romances, songs by Soviet composers. Remeta, 192, 195, 240-41, 244.

academic music; some classes were given in folk music.⁵⁸ Thus, in schools throughout the country, it was assumed that folk singing was simply a branch of academic singing.

That situation changed starting in 1947, when the first cultural enlightenment schools were opened. These institutions, which were formed under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, were specially designed to train workers and teachers in the areas of library work, art, music, dance and theater for cultural institutions and trade-union clubs in villages and towns throughout the USSR. All students received instruction in political agitation as part of their training. In the 1950s and 60s the network of cultural enlightenment schools was expanded to include institutes of culture, which offered similar training at a more advanced level.

The music programs of these schools were not as demanding as those of the music high schools and conservatories; rather, the students were specifically trained to work in the field of amateur music activity. For this reason, there was greater emphasis placed upon folk music.⁵⁹ At a higher educational level, a special program for folk chorus conductors was organized at the Gnesin Institute in Moscow in 1966.⁶⁰ Later, other specific programs at technical school and conservatory level were opened for those wishing to sing in or conduct folk choruses.⁶¹ Thus, especially since the 1950s-60s, there has been no shortage of professionals to fill the ranks of professional music ensembles and to teach amateur folk musicians and dancers.

The ample literature created for these professionals implied that these cadres were needed in order to raise the level of culture of the general population and to keep folk art from becoming vulgar.

⁵⁸ Bryce, 72.

⁵⁹ Remeta, 286-87. See also G. Karpov, "O kul'turno-prosvetitel'nykh shkolakh," *Kul'turno-prosvetitel'naia rabota*, no. 9 (1948), 46-48.

⁶⁰ The program was initiated by Alexander Iurlov, conductor of the RSFSR Academic Russian Chorus. See Viacheslav Shchurov, "Slovo chistoi vody glotok," *Narodnoe tvorchestvo*, no. 5 (1997): 40; and V. Popov, "A. A. Iurlov i narodnaia pesnia," *Aleksandr Iurlov. Stat'i i vospominaniia. Materialy.*, ed. I. Marisova (Moscow, 1983), 43.

⁶¹ The programs include, for example, a major in folk chorus directing at the Moscow Institute of Culture, the Gnesin Music School, and the Moscow Cultural-Pedagogical School, all of which were initiated by the first graduates from the Gnesin Institute folk chorus directing program. Besides these, a major in folk music or folk chorus is currently offered in institutes in Leningrad, Volgograd, Saratov, Ekaterinburg, Nizhni Novgorod, Petrozavodsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoiasrk, Vologda, and Irkutsk, among other cities. There are special conservatory

Soviet musicologists widely used the words “high level of culture,” or “high artistic level” to praise the folk singing of professional and amateur folk choruses.⁶² Related to the idea of professionalism in folk music was the rejection of the “decadence” of popular urban music (said to belong to bourgeois culture in its decline) and the creation of a picture of folk music as pure, lofty and clean.

Soviet-era choruses and orchestras were likened to Andreev’s late nineteenth-century folk orchestra in possessing a noble spirit that never stooped to being “cheap, overly free/familiar, or aiming at external effect.” Descriptions of folk art widely used the concept of “*sderzhannost’*,” that is, “restraint” or “reserve.”⁶³ There was an implication in writing about folk choruses that the folk manner (or people’s popular taste), if let out of the control of professionals, might tend towards decadence and tastelessness. By contrast, professional folk choruses were a means to ensure that folk music would always remain tasteful and “contemporary,” that is, faithful to Soviet ideology.

This was the idea underlying the Soviet concept of “patronage” (*shefstvo*), which was widely referred to in articles about amateur artistic activity from the 1930s to the 1980s. The professionals were meant to have patronage over amateurs; the city was meant to have patronage over the village. In practical terms, this meant that professional composers, choruses, orchestras, and the like would establish mentoring relationships with corresponding amateur ensembles. They would share music with and give advice to their amateur “younger brethren”⁶⁴; they would arrange lectures, classes, and concerts for them, or invite them to the city for consultations.⁶⁵ In more abstract terms, the notion of patronage implies a hierarchy in which villagers and amateurs are the beneficiaries of the important blessings of their educated, city-dwelling, professional comrades. Ironically, “amateur” village carriers of local folk traditions are implicitly told that “their” traditions are “safe” in the hands of professionals. A 1968 book

programs in folklore and folk music only in St. Petersburg and Voronezh. See Shchurov, “Slovno chistoi vody glotok,” (1997): 41; and Natalia Giliarova, interview with author, Moscow, 25 September 1998.

⁶² See L. Kulakovskii, “O russkoi narodnoi pesennoi klassike,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 11 (1949), 42; M. Cheremukhin, “Proshloe i nastoiashchee orkestrrov russkikh narodnykh instrumentov,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 5 (1949): 53; Asaf’ev (1948), 24.

⁶³ Cheremukhin, 53.

⁶⁴ “Neskol’ko myslei po povodu olimpiady muzyki i tantsa,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 9 (1935): 62.

⁶⁵ I. Chekhov, D. Eppel’, *Selu -- kul’turu gorodskuiu* (Moscow, 1968), 94-98.

entitled *City Culture – to the Village* makes this clear: “The keeper of folklore, the desired guest of the cities and villages of the oblast, is the Ural Russian Folk Chorus, which brings the distinctive folk art of the Urals to the masses.”⁶⁶

The folk orchestra and the legacy of classical music

The Piatnitskii Chorus’s addition of a full orchestra in 1938 became a part of the standard for professional and amateur folk choirs. Adding an orchestra was significant musically, because it constituted an innovation in Russian music in several ways. Singing was much more characteristic of Russian village music-making than instrumental music, because of the church’s long-standing prohibition against instrumental music.⁶⁷ Ensembles of folk instruments existed in certain periods and geographical areas, but in general, their use was related to specific occasions.⁶⁸

The phenomenon of the folk orchestra itself was based upon Western models. It was invented in the 1880s by Vassilii Andreev, who standardized folk lutes (balalaikas) and constructed them so that they could play in all the registers commonly included in a Western classical orchestra – from “piccolo” to “bass.” Andreev arranged Russian folk songs and Russian and Western classical repertoire for the orchestra. The arrangements of folk songs were constructed so as to make up for the lack of singing and words, by varying the melody and by introducing contrasts in registers, volume, and other aspects.⁶⁹

Since the folk orchestra’s repertoire was designed to render folk songs in a different form than that provided by singing them, combining a folk orchestra with a chorus was an innovation in folk

⁶⁶ I. Chekhov, D. Eppel’, 93.

⁶⁷ Izalii Zemtsovskii, “Russian Folk Music,” s. v. “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 19: 396.

⁶⁸ Traditions of instrumental ensemble playing existed in medieval Russia. Ivan the Terrible collected *skomorokhi* (folk performers) from various areas of Russia for court entertainment; these musicians formed ensembles of stringed instruments, *domry*, *gusli*, and *gudki*. It is assumed that during medieval times *skomorokhi* and villagers played instruments in other combinations as well. Later, village ensembles containing various assortments of wind, string, and percussion instruments, and ranging in size from 2-3 instruments to groups of 10-12 and larger, were found in Russia. Ensembles made up of several instruments of one type (such as violins, flutes, different sizes of *gudki* or *domry*) also existed, as did traditions of instruments playing together with singing. Often it was the case that larger ensembles would only be collected at special occasions, like Christmas. See A. A. Banin, *Russkaia instrumental’naia muzyka fol’klornoi traditsii* (Moscow, 1997), 9, 64, 131-134.

⁶⁹ Cheremukhin, 53.

orchestra tradition. To be sure, the Andreev orchestra had included numbers in which it accompanied singers, most often soloists. However, the idea of accompanying a chorus was new, and qualitatively different – after all, the idea behind instrumental accompaniment is usually to fill in voices which are felt (because of reigning aesthetic standards) to be lacking in the vocal rendition. If a chorus was singing, then it could theoretically produce all the voices that were “needed” (in terms of either Western or Russian folk aesthetics). However, an orchestra’s range and its ability to create a wide variety of sounds were greater; thus, the addition of an orchestra to a choral performance would increase the ensemble’s ability to perform more complex arrangements. Complexity was valued because it reflected the aesthetic standards of Western classical music.⁷⁰

In fact, there was a precedent for this kind of ensemble in Western classical music, that is, in the opera. In that genre, choral singing is often accompanied by an orchestra. In the nineteenth century, Russian composers had brought the folk song to the stage in this form, using either composed melodies that sounded like folk songs, or actual folk melodies set to music. In such operas, typically, a chorus of women dressed in colorful and ornate stylizations of folk costumes would sing (and often dance) while the orchestra played accompaniment. A folk-song scene was almost *de rigueur* for Russian operas composed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the romanticization of “the people” reached its heights among the intelligentsia.

The legacy of the national composers of the nineteenth century was actively promoted by the Soviet cultural establishment during the Stalin period and after. Their music was widely played, huge festivals were held on anniversaries of the composers’ births, and the conservatories in Moscow and

⁷⁰ V. Poponov argues that the director of the new Piatnitskii Chorus orchestra, Vasilii Khvatov, was aware of the difficulties of adding an orchestra to a chorus that was used to singing unarranged folk songs without accompaniment. There were potential problems in matching the harmonic structure of the songs, the forms of voice-leading, and in the musical syntax: “for the songs sung by the chorus, it was not characteristic to divide [the music] into short sections, to change tempo inside of a single construction, to have varied and contrasting dynamic nuances or timbre colorations, or to organize the [musical] material in elaborate ways.” According to Poponov, these difficulties were overcome through hard and careful work and through the helpful criticism of Zakharov, the chorus’s director. See *Orkestr khora imeni Piatnitskogo* (Moscow, 1979), 69. In fact, however, it is more likely that the changes which the chorus itself underwent in this period, predisposed it to being able to sing with an orchestra.

Leningrad were re-named after Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, respectively.⁷¹ In fact, many of the Soviets' views on folk music were inherited directly from the Mighty Handful of nationalist composers. These composers widely used folk motifs in their compositions.

However, the basis of this music was always Western; their conceptions of Russian folk music were formulated so as to fit in the Western musical system. As Jennifer Fuller writes, "the Kuchka sought to emphasize the Russian musical legacy that was their creation and channel it through a European musical format."⁷² This principle was generally true of the folk-based music created by Soviet composers during the Stalin period as well.

In both art music based upon folk motifs and popular folk songs and music arranged by composers, the principle was the same: the folk melody served as "raw material" for an artistic creation. A Soviet musicologist wrote in 1946:

The task of a Soviet composer is not only to repeat a folk melody, just fitting it to contemporary musical forms . . . The composer may do more – [he can] reveal the "hidden potentials" of the work, which was made by an "ingenious" folk author "who hides inside himself sparks of divinity," as Rimsky-Korsakov put it; [he can] see and uncover that which the folk singer had as yet indistinctly guessed, vaguely felt.⁷³

The implication was that folk music might be extremely valuable, but its value would be unseen unless a composer could "polish the gem" and reveal the true beauty hidden under the rough exterior of the folk song. This view reflected the Romantic myth of the artist as a craftsman who, through his inspiration, provides a channel for higher wisdom (in this case, the wisdom of the people, who themselves provide a channel for national culture).

⁷¹ Schwarz, 137-38

⁷² Jennifer Fuller, "Epic Melodies: An Examination of Folk Motifs in the Text and Music of *Prince Igor*," in *Intersections and Transpositions: Russian Music, Literature, and Society*, ed. Andrew Baruch Wachtel (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press), 35.

⁷³ N. Briusova, "Vtorichnaia zhizn' russkoi narodnoi pesni v operakh sovetskikh kompozitorov," *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 8-9 (1946): 57.

High culture

The link between Soviet and late nineteenth-century cultural practice existed in all the arts, not only in music. The reigning ideological “style” for all the arts during the Stalin period was socialist realism, a concept which draws heavily on the notions of realism predominant during the second half of the nineteenth century in Russia, in literature, painting, and music. The doctrine of socialist realism required “that writers ‘learn from the classics,’ putting the techniques of nineteenth-century Russian realism at the service of the proletariat and the party.”⁷⁴

One reason for this adoption of nineteenth-century culture was the Marxist view that the high culture of the landowners during feudalism and capitalism was “created on the basis of the exploitation of the labor” of the proletariat, and that therefore it now properly belonged to the masses.⁷⁵ One of the goals of socialism was then to recoup this culture for the new classless society. Thus the Soviet view of art, as it evolved into a monolithic entity in the 1930s, did not really posit a new Soviet artistic culture. Instead, the achievements of nineteenth-century realist culture were held up as models for the new art.

This was a paradox for two reasons. First, the *past* was tacitly being held as a goal for a society that wanted to create itself *anew*. Soviet society was ostensibly future-oriented, but the new was deemed shocking and dangerous. Attempts to create new modernist styles in all of the arts were branded as bourgeois and decadent from the 1930s through the end of Stalin’s reign. By contrast, the past was safe. Nineteenth-century realist culture was made a model because it reflected the beginnings of a critical approach to the Tsarist political system, and also because of its apparent straightforwardness and accessibility. But its “safety” also lay in its worldwide status as a treasure belonging to the golden age of Russian culture. It reflected a time when Russia participated fully in the culture of the West, was admired for its contribution and was seen as an equal by the West.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Max Hayward, *Writers in Russia: 1917-1978*, ed. Patricia Blake (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 62.

⁷⁵ “Muzyka,” *Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, (Moscow, 1926-47) 40: 569.

⁷⁶ See, for example, “Muzyka velikogo russkogo naroda,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 5 (1949): 5-6.

The second paradox is related: high culture, traditionally the sphere of the *elite*, was held up as a model for the *common* people of the Soviet Union. High culture, with its complexity and refinement, became the yardstick against which every person involved in culture and every cultural product was judged. As with the previous paradox, here the West is used as the yardstick for Russia. Russia's population was largely rural and poorly educated; the party-line Soviet intellectual elites saw it as their task to bring the people enlightenment through exposure to certain aspects of Western high culture. The task of claiming the heritage of classical music for the common people was a difficult one, especially in the field of music, where literacy and competence had been the provenance of only a dedicated few, and classical training took years to complete. Soviet musicologists were aware of this, and wrote frequently (especially in the 1920s and 1930s) about the necessity to educate the public in the basics of music – Western classical music.⁷⁷

By the late 1940s, they were writing that this goal had been largely accomplished. A composer who was sent to a collective farm in Moscow oblast in 1949 praised the rural residents for their cultural level: “The kolkhoz members love popular folk songs, but they can appreciate works with more complexity. We observed with what rapt attention [they] ... listened to Glinka's ‘Kamarinskaia’ on the radio. There is no doubt that even symphonic music has every right to be heard in radio programs for kolkhoz workers.”⁷⁸ The composer's suggestion that rural people could appreciate and even participate in classical music performance was a common thread in publications about music from before and after World War II.⁷⁹

In wishing to bring nineteenth-century high culture to “the people,” the Soviets echoed the views of the nineteenth-century nationalist composers themselves. One of the goals of the Mighty Handful had been to use folk motifs in such a way that the Russian people would recognize the pieces as their own, but

⁷⁷ As Amy Nelson points out, this elitist view originated with the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, RAPM. See “The Struggle for Proletarian Music: RAPM and the Cultural Revolution,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 108.

⁷⁸ Mikhail Grachev, “Nedelia v kolkhoze,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 8 (1949): 5.

⁷⁹ For another example, see “Samodeiatel'nost khudozhestvennaia,” *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1926-47), 50: 182.

to set the pieces in the Western classical style so that the listeners would, in the process, receive a kind of education in European music. In this way, the composers would “bridge the gap between the Russian masses and the Westernized cultural elite.”⁸⁰

Similarly, the Mighty Handful as well as the Soviet musical establishment both lamented the popularity of vaudeville-type songs, so-called “Gypsy” songs, and city songs. The nineteenth-century theorists felt that these songs were polluting the national character of the folk song.⁸¹ Soviet critics used strong language to indicate that such songs did not reflect the Russian people and did not belong to their heritage. Words used to describe the true folk character of the Russian people included “optimism,” “restraint,” “collective,” and “highest simplicity.”⁸² By contrast, the urban songs were termed “cheap” and “decadent.”⁸³ Urban culture was excluded from the possibility of representing the pure, lofty Russian soul.⁸⁴

Instead, a version of folk culture was crafted that excluded elements of bawdiness, sexuality, and sarcasm (unless the sarcasm was directed at the Tsarist system, of course). This “clean” version of Russian folklore dates back to the nineteenth century, but it served the Soviets well in their search for a version of folklore that would predict a “bright future.” The myth of true Russian folklore as pure and clean became so entrenched that many oppositional revivalists in the late twentieth century subscribed to it, and shied away from the study of folklore with erotic content.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Fuller, 46.

⁸¹ David Brown, Gerald Abraham, David Lloyd Jones, and Edward Gardá, *Russian Masters* (New York: Norton, 1980), 28, cited in Fuller, 35.

⁸² Cheremukhin, 53, 54, 56.

⁸³ Robert A. Rothstein, “Popular Song in the NEP Era,” *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 271; see also Viacheslav Shchurov, “Russkii fol’klor v sovremennoi kontsertnoi zhizni,” *Den’ pesni* vyp. 6 (1988): 33.

⁸⁴ Asaf’ev writes: “the ancient drawn-out lyric song [is] like a clear crystal mirror -- the reflection of the people’s soul [*narodnaia dusha*],” (1948), 29.

⁸⁵ Elena Minyonok, interview with author, Moscow, 16 November 1998; see also Laura Olson, “In the Field with Russian Scholars: Observations by an American Researcher,” *Slavic and East European Folklore Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 15-20.

Folk Polyphony and its Significance

In 1948, there was a shake-up in the world of music that affected how classical and folk music were regarded. By then it had become typical for amateur and professional choruses in the USSR to present folk music with an orchestra and/or accordion, and with songs arranged in harmony. Similarly, classical music had attempted to incorporate folk elements, especially in ballets, operas and symphonies. However, alongside this music that was “simple, wholesome, socialist, and patriotic,” there was also modernist music that was attacked as “bourgeois” and “depraved,” as was Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth* in 1936.⁸⁶

Modernism in music was said to be unacceptable since it would be incomprehensible to the workers and peasants who were joining the mainstream of culture.⁸⁷ In 1948, the world of music erupted again with a resolution issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, “On the Opera *Great Friendship* by Muradeli.” Although the opera in question seemed to meet ideological demands by showing different cultures and depicting an important historical event, the party condemned the opera for its formalism. Muradeli had not used folk material that would have helped to characterize the various ethnic groups; instead of being melodic, the music was “discordant” and based upon “dissonances.” In general, the resolution berated Soviet composers for rejecting “polyphonic music and polyphonic singing” and paying insufficient attention to “melody” in their modernist, “formalist” compositions.⁸⁸

These formulations draw specific attention to the Russian tradition of folk polyphony as a basis for Soviet music – not only folk music but art music as well. The government’s desire to promote folk polyphony is understandable. The system of Russian folk polyphony is complex and original to Russia. It characterized vocal music-making in many areas of rural Russia since the formation of Muscovite Rus’ (fourteenth through seventeenth centuries).⁸⁹ It had impressed foreigners when Russian folk ensembles

⁸⁶ Schwartz, 142-46, 165.

⁸⁷ Israel Nestyev, *Prokofiev*, trans. Florence Jonas (Stanford: Stanford University Press and London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 277, cited in Schwartz, 141.

⁸⁸ “On the Opera *Great Friendship* by Muradeli,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 1 (1948), translated as “Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 10 February 1948,” in Slonimskii, 1359-60.

⁸⁹ Zemtsovskii (1980), 388.

traveled abroad in the late nineteenth century.⁹⁰ Thus, it was a source of pride. It had been imitated by some of the nineteenth-century nationalist composers, who tried to capture its complex melodic system.

In fact, however, the government's sudden promotion of folk polyphony had a purely ideological basis, and was not well-founded in music theory. The system of Russian folk polyphony is, in essence, incompatible with the Western musical system, in which harmonization is based upon chords. By contrast, in Russian folk polyphony, in principle, all the voices sing versions of the same tune.⁹¹ Each voice is singing a melody. Although something sounding like chords may be formed in the process of the singing, in fact there are usually notes "outside of the [standard] chords," and the singers do not behave in terms of chordal harmonization.⁹² The tonic-dominant progression and the concept of leading melody and parallel harmonies, which are common in Western music, are not characteristic of Russian folk polyphony.⁹³ Instead, singers have different *functions* within the singing group. What a given singer sings varies somewhat from verse to verse and from performance to performance. In drawn-out songs (*protiazhnye pesni*), the extent of variation of the melody can be extremely complex.⁹⁴

Given these differences, it is surprising to see Russian folk polyphony advanced as the premise upon which compositions of art music should be based. It is equally surprising that after the 1948 resolution there was a popular call for the use of folk polyphony in Russian folk music, including *arranged* and *orchestrated* folk songs. For instance, in 1949 a commentator on the Russian folk orchestra called for folk polyphony in future compositions. He faulted the nineteenth-century Andreev orchestra for the lack of such polyphony, saying that "the absence of true folk polyphony robbed it [the orchestra] of the possibility to completely express the character of folk singing [*pesennost'*]." ⁹⁵ Yet how were folk

⁹⁰ Izalii Zemtsovskii, *Iskateli pesen: Rasskazy o sobiratel'nykh narodnykh pesen v dorevoliutsionnoi i Sovetskoi Rossii* (Leningrad, 1967), 67-68.

⁹¹ Russian folk polyphony differs from Western polyphony as well as from Western harmony; see Swan, 512.

⁹² Elizabeth A. Warner and Evgenii S. Kustovskii, *Russian Traditional Folk Song* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1990), 10; see also Howe, 186.

⁹³ Viacheslav Shchurov, Interview with author, Moscow, 9 November 1998. Shchurov was relating that he does not like the fact that the music of the Soviet folk chorus tends to follow the tonic-dominant progression.

⁹⁴ Zemtsovskii (1980), 394.

⁹⁵ Cheremukhin, 53.

orchestras and choruses, the music of which had been based upon Western harmony since their inception, to play and sing folk polyphony?

Clearly, the premise that Russian folk music should serve as the model for all Soviet music is a plea for patriotism. It lays bare the hidden imperialism of the Soviet project, since the musics of all the peoples in the Soviet Union were supposed to be based upon the notion of choral singing in several parts; this was true even of peoples whose singing traditions featured only unison singing. But it also recalls the recent invasion of the Soviet Union by German fascists who scorned Slavs. Articles on folk polyphony that appeared after the resolution reflected the need to remember the cultural traditions of Russians: their intent was to establish that Russian polyphony existed independently of European traditions and arose before the influx of European traditions in Russian music.⁹⁶ As a post-war rhetorical move, this was clearly meant to show the independent bases of Russian music, as a means of validating Russian culture and Russia's claims to sovereign nationhood.

More specifically with regard to folk music, the resolution helps to uncover some of the basic contradictions that run throughout Soviet music. In this document and other comments on it written at the time, there is the assumption that folk music is "natural" and that modernist music is artificial. Folk music leads to patriotism and optimism; modernism to "depression," "psychopathology, sexual perversion, [and] amorality" associated with the West and America.⁹⁷ But at the same time as composers are exhorted to use the simple melodies of the Russian people, there is a call for imitation of Western classical opera.⁹⁸ Although the resolution calls for folk polyphony, clearly what is desired is not Russian folk polyphony itself, but the version of it that Russians – and the world – came to know and love through the compositions of Glinka, Mussorgsky, Balakirev, and the like.

⁹⁶ E. V. Gippius, "O russkoi narodnoi podgolosochnoi polofonii v kontse XVIII-nachale XIX veka," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 2 (1948): 104.

⁹⁷ "Declaration of Tikhon Khrennikov" in "Discussion at a General Assembly of Soviet Composers, Moscow, 17-26 February 1948," translated in Slonimskii, 1366.

⁹⁸ See, for example, "Speech of A. A. Zhdanov" in "Discussion at a General Assembly of Soviet Composers, Moscow, 17-26 February 1948," translated in Slonimskii, 1363.

It is not the case that writers who urged adoption of polyphony in the late 1940s did not adequately understand it: it had been “discovered” in the second half of the nineteenth century by collectors who had begun to realize the importance of writing down the variations in the different voices in a Russian peasant singing group.⁹⁹ During the late 1940s and early 1950s, a major study of Russian folk polyphony was published, and another was re-published. The latter studies were partially oriented towards composers who wanted to compose in the folk-polyphony style – as had the nineteenth century composers, Balakirev and Mussorgsky.¹⁰⁰

With all the attention to polyphony after 1948, it is not clear whether anything was composed or performed that approximated the Russian folk polyphony system. Often when the call for folk polyphony was mentioned in an article about a folk group, there was also concurrent mention of accordion accompaniment, which precludes true polyphony. As Feodosii Rubtsov pointed out in one of his criticisms of the folk chorus, chorus members generally had not learned to sing polyphonically and were consequently afraid to sing *a capella*. They found folk songs boring and shortened the verses, instead of learning to vary their singing from verse to verse.¹⁰¹ It was not until later, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that Russian folk polyphony would be performed in the context of art music. Until then, the performance of Russian folk music remained much what it had been – polished renditions of melodies set to vocal harmonies and/or instrumental accompaniment.

⁹⁹ The musicologists who first wrote down Russian folk polyphony in note form were V. Prokunin, Iu. Mel’gunov, and N. Pal’chikov, all of whom worked in the 1870s. Mel’gunov was the first to describe several important features of Russian folk polyphony. See E. V. Gippius, “O russkoi narodnoi podgolosochnoi polifonii v kontse XVIII-nachale XIX veka,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 2 (1948): 101-102. Anna Rudneva is a representative of the view that folk polyphony was not adequately understood by those who discovered it in the nineteenth century; she argues that the work of Evgeniia Lineva and A. Listopadov in the early twentieth century did much more to uncover the essence of the phenomenon. See “Russkoe narodnoe khorovoe ispolnitel’stvo,” *Russkoe narodnoe muzykal’noe tvorchestvo: Ocherki po teorii fol’klora* (Moscow, 1994), 190.

¹⁰⁰ Balakirev and Mussorgsky were somewhat successful at composing in the folk polyphony style, according to Gippius (1948), 103-104.

¹⁰¹ Rubtsov, “Russkie narodnye khory i psevdonardnye pesni,” 199.

Folklore “revival” in the 1950s-60s?

With the 1948 context in mind, it is easier to make sense of the appearance, in the late 1950s and 1960s – the Khrushchev era – of some re-evaluations of the folk chorus style. At that time, folk choruses received some criticism in the Soviet press, the size of some of the professional folk choruses was cut,¹⁰² and in 1961 the board of the Ministry of Culture issued a ruling stating that in their search for “superficial success” and stage appeal (“*estradnost*”), the choruses had introduced too many songs that were musically far from the folk character.¹⁰³

Official pronouncements such as these, together with the 1948 call for more attention to folk polyphony, might be viewed as constituting a Soviet policy of folk revival. Indeed, as I have shown, the rhetoric of “preservation” had been important throughout this time. “Propaganda of the Russian folk song” was a prevalent term in writing about music. Were Soviet policy-makers encouraging genuine interest in ancient folk traditions? Did they really urge a turn away from the showy presentation of arranged music “far from the folk character”?

Apparently, this was not the case. The evidence suggests that not only did the government *not* make an effort to change the mass-produced character of its folk-chorus phenomenon, in fact it continued to support the continuing manufacture of the folk chorus and all of its accessories. One could even say the government *strengthened* the structure needed to support the folk chorus phenomenon, by opening more educational programs dedicated to providing trained personnel to lead and staff professional and amateur folk choruses, orchestras, and dance ensembles.

Starting in the late 1940s programs for training cultural enlightenment workers were opened all over the USSR. After 1948, the number of folk choruses rose tremendously.¹⁰⁴ Then in the late 1960s the first program for training folk chorus conductors was opened in Moscow, and similar programs were subsequently opened in other Moscow schools and other areas of the country. Whether or not these

¹⁰² Poponov, 102.

¹⁰³ “Postanovlenie kollegii Ministerstva kul’turny SSSR” June 20, 1961, cited in Kopusov, 22.

programs were and are primarily oriented towards the revival of Russian folk music or toward the production of cadres for the folk choruses is a matter of some debate among present-day revivalists.¹⁰⁵ My impression of the work of the folk chorus departments, based upon my observations of some of their performances and rehearsals in 1998-99, is that they are primarily oriented towards graduating professional singers, conductors, and teachers who will promote the approach to folk music made popular by the professional folk choruses.¹⁰⁶

Given how entrenched the folk chorus style is even today, it seems likely that any government efforts to change how folk music was played would have been in vain. The ideological groundwork for the creation of the folk chorus phenomenon had its roots in a deep-seated and widespread belief that Western classical art was the epitome of high culture. The majority of Russian society, from policy-makers to folk chorus members, appreciated and strove to duplicate what they believed to be a mix of Western precision and beauty and Russian expressiveness.

The view that training in classical vocal technique and music theory was needed for folk singers was prevalent, and this type of training was well-established in the educational system. Folk ensembles were becoming more and more like academic choirs.¹⁰⁷ They adopted many of the characteristics that would please audiences who had been educated in Western taste, such as musical dynamics, a Western conception of harmony, a refined sound, consonance of voice and instruments, identical costuming, the

¹⁰⁴ N. Kotikova states that “The number of Russian folk choruses rises from year to year, especially in the cities. In Leningrad alone at the present time there are 68 Russian folk song collectives (in 1947 there were only six). See “O russkikh narodnykh khorakh,” *Sovetskaia muzyka*, no. 2 (1957), 153.

¹⁰⁵ Shchurov argues that the organization of the major in folk chorus directing at the Gnesin Institute in the late 1960s was a major push for the revival movement. See “Slovno chistoi vody glotok” (1997), 40. Natalia Giliarova says that this department taught in a serious way only for the first few years; later, it lost its focus on research, which she considers essential to a revivalist mission. Interview with author, Moscow, 31 October 1998.

¹⁰⁶ Exceptions abound. Many times within one department there are teachers with a revivalist mentality and others with a folk chorus mentality. Students may learn improvisation from the revivalist teachers while learning to sing arranged music in a stylized voice from the other teachers. In general, the academic structure of most of the folk chorus departments resists a revivalist approach, since revivalism is rooted in deep knowledge of folklore, while these departments are preparing specialists for specific, narrowly-defined jobs as heads of performing groups. The academic departments which do offer a revivalist approach are much more rigorous; examples are the programs at the Leningrad Conservatory headed by Anatolii Mekhnetsov, and the one at the Voronezh Conservatory headed by T. Sysoeva. Students in these programs are being trained as folklorists (researchers) as well as ensemble leaders.

way of standing and behaving on stage, etc. Yet what they were presenting was known as “Russian folk music,” and this style was known as the standard in presenting Russian folk music.

This simultaneous reliance on the standards of Western classical aesthetics and desire to promote Russian folk music are typical of the Soviet period; but the roots of this approach clearly belong to the previous century. The folk chorus style and the aesthetic views underpinning it draw upon two musical phenomena from the late nineteenth century: the national school of music (the Mighty Handful), which appropriated folk melodies in order to display national culture on stage and promulgated the view that Western classical music was the finest form in which to situate the Russian folk idiom; and the revivalist choruses and orchestras, which incorporated some of the principles of classical music into the practice of folk music, and established many of the standards for presenting folk music on stage. The Agrenev-Slavianskii chorus and others like it were models for the Soviet-era folk chorus. The way of singing and playing, and dancing, the costuming and the manner of presentation on stage all were traditions formed in the second half of the nineteenth century and adopted in the Soviet period.

Although the Agrenev-Slavianskii chorus and the Andreev orchestra had primarily revivalist agendas, and although the Soviets imitated their style, I argue that the Soviet bureaucracy did not carry out a program of revival, but instead appropriated Russian and other ethnic folk music for specific goals. In this sense, the Soviet project was closer to that of the national school of composers of the late nineteenth century. Both the Mighty Handful and the Soviets engaged in appropriation of folk culture, although their methods and their goals were different.

While the Mighty Handful appropriated folk melodies for use in authored artistic compositions which were primarily played by professional musicians for elite audiences, the Soviets used folk melodies in authored compositions and arrangements meant for mass singing and playing. While the Mighty Handful used folk melodies to increase the realism and the national flavor of artistic compositions, for the Soviets, the use of folk melodies in compositions and arrangements was meant to promote a myth of a

¹⁰⁷ Rubtsov argues the choruses do not have an academic sound but use academic ways of working and structure of the chorus (“Russkie narodnye khory i psevdonarodnye pesni,” 198); Shchurov says that some choruses use an

rural idyll (the Potemkin village); to ideologically re-educate the peasantry; and to boost patriotism, as well as to provide a musical context for communal activity.

Both the Mighty Handful and official Soviet culture put folk culture to specific uses, changing its basic character, and converting it to a new context. By contrast, revival attempts to discover and to preserve the basic character of the revived object. To be sure, revivalists have agendas (often political as well as artistic) and they do change the character of the revived tradition in the process of fitting it into a contemporary context (Andreev's changes to the balalaika are an example). But their main focus is defining authenticity and preserving a tradition.

If the Soviet approach was not one of revival, then what should we make of official Soviet post-war calls for the inclusion of more ancient folk songs in the repertoires of folk choruses? Were these simply empty calls, or did anyone heed them and make changes? If there were changes, it likely meant that choruses would use one or two from the handful of already well-known songs collected a century ago, or would include in their repertoire a few local songs.

In the 1960s, criticisms of the folk chorus phenomenon revealed that nothing had changed as a result of government calls for polyphony. Amateur choruses were singing the works of Soviet professional and amateur composers, often the conductors of the choirs themselves. One critic wrote that the "musical language" of these songs was so "devoid of individuality" [*obezlichen*] that it was hard to tell them apart: "in 99 out of 100 cases the 'lyrical genre' is limited to the excessively sentimental [*dusheshchipatel'nyi*] waltz in 3/4 time"; melodies were "hackneyed," and the structure of the compositions was that of standard Western harmony, without any thought of polyphony. Particularly clichéd were solo and choral works accompanied by accordion. Composers were avoiding the local styles of their regions in favor of a generalized Soviet musical stereotype.¹⁰⁸

Thus, calls for more "authentic" repertoire did not change the essence of the folk chorus phenomenon. The pronouncements had an empty ring that seemed to continue the tradition of using

academic sound (1988), 34.

¹⁰⁸ G. Bruk, "Chto pet' samodeiatel'nosti," *Sovetskaiia muzyka*, no. 12 (1965): 121-22.

rhetoric to support folk traditions, and – what is even more problematic – equating the *rhetoric* of preservation with the *practice* of Soviet-style folklore performance. Whether the Soviet calls for preservation led some folklorists to engage in revival – and subsequently led to the revival movement of the 1970s to the present – is a question which will be addressed in other research.

My own discovery of this phenomenon – that is, how Soviet rhetorical support of folk preservation went hand in hand with the practice of Soviet-style folklore performance – helped to explain some events that I at first found extremely curious. In 1998-99, I was perplexed that even those folk musicians who were carrying on the Soviet folk chorus style of presentation stated that they were helping to “preserve” Russian folk traditions.

For instance, in September 1998, at a local festival in the Cossack settlement Veshenskaia, on the Don river in Rostov oblast, most of the folk music groups who performed wore identical costumes made out of shiny, color-coordinated materials and sang arranged or composed music with the accompaniment of accordions. One group even used a bass balalaika in a way that imitated the bass’s function in Western popular music; and they performed “lip-sync” style rather than live (they had just recorded a CD and wanted people to hear it). Still, even though they used costumes, instruments, and performance styles that represented Soviet-style folk performance (or perhaps a newer version influenced by Western pop music performance), not rural folk traditions of either Cossacks or Russians, the leaders of these groups told me they were trying to propagandize and preserve Russian and Cossack folk traditions. For them, there was no sense of a contradiction in this.

I suggest that this phenomenon – which was repeated many times as I attended different folk music events in 1998-99 – arose because of the long *tradition* in Russian and Soviet culture of a combination of polished performance of arranged folk music, and rhetoric proclaiming support for preservation of folk traditions. The tradition dates back to Dmitri Agrenev-Slavianskii’s folk chorus and Vasilii Andreev’s folk orchestra in the late nineteenth century: both of those leaders combined strong rhetoric supporting the popularization of Russian folk music, with a performance style that took its cues

from Western stage performance techniques (from the spheres of the variety show, opera and classical music).

This long-standing tradition did not die out with the end of the Soviet Union. Folk groups I encountered in the 1990s tenaciously clung to their notion of “preservation” even when I pointed out what seemed to me to be inconsistencies. It seemed to them that even if they were not preserving the exact letter of certain traditions, they were preserving a *general* tradition – general Russian, say, even if not Cossack – or the *spirit* of such traditions.

However, a third, complicating element in this history of the treatment of Russian folk music has been left out of this picture. That is the emergence of the revival movement in the intervening years, the 1970s through the present. We can see the traces of this movement in the scene of the September festival at Veshenskaia: not only did the men who performed “lip-sync” style proclaim that they were preserving folk traditions with their music; they also maintained that they actively seek out older informants, Cossack men who can teach them the old style of singing, and that they learn directly from them, “from mouth to mouth.” They said they particularly value this oral transmission because of the ancient stylistic features it preserved, such as vocal production and vowel changes; they also said that they can learn *whole songs* this way, and not be limited to what was permitted during Soviet times, when sections of song texts would be cut out because they “didn’t fit with the politics of the time.”¹⁰⁹ The men’s discourse – their talk of older informants with different vocal and dialectal styles, the importance of oral transmission from generation to generation, and their implicit critique of how the Soviets handled folklore – suggests that in their minds their activity belongs not to the Soviet brand of folk preservation, but to the work of the *folk revival movement*. Future research will look at the origins and the nature of this movement.

¹⁰⁹ Pavel Vagner and Sergei Strel’tsov, interview with author, Veshenskaia stanitsa, Rostov oblast, 20 September 1998.