

## **A Challenge to a Soviet Musicologist: Remember the Infamous Events of 1948/1949**

YULIA KREININ

*Dedicated to the blessed memory of my senior colleagues in Moscow,  
whose courageous support paved for me the way  
to university teaching and research work*

**Abstract:** The infamous resolution of 1948, denouncing formalism in music, was widely considered as a serious blow to outstanding composers such as Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, and others. Far less attention was paid to the destinies of musicologists who also suffered during the second wave of official denunciation in 1949. In fact, musicologists were severely criticized both as the pioneers of formalism and as cosmopolitans (i.e., Jews). The author shows that the spirit of 1948/1949 negatively influenced not only the young and accomplished scholars of that generation, but affected the professional and public atmosphere for quite a long time, until Gorbachev's "perestroika". The personal destiny and career of the author, examined in the context of the 1970s, describes the dangers in her decision to research 20<sup>th</sup> century non-Russian music, and the complications stemming from her Jewish nationality. Thanks to the support and prolonged fight undertaken by her teachers and senior colleagues she was accepted to PhD studies and later to a research position at the Russian Art Research Institute, Moscow. Presumably her specialization in 20<sup>th</sup> century music, which was not very widespread in Israel as well as among new immigrants from the Soviet Union, was in fact the key that provided her with the opportunity to be included in the Hebrew University support program for new immigrants in 1995, and later to teach there at the Department of Musicology.

**Keywords:** Soviet musicology in 1948/1949; 1949 trial of musicologists; Jewish musicologists and the anti-cosmopolitan campaign; 20th-century music as a disapproved-of subject; musicologists' professional solidarity.

### **Introduction**

In October 1971 I stood before the examination board of the Department of Musicology, at the Tchaikovsky State Conservatory in Moscow. My subject was a rare bird at that time, for my MA thesis was dedicated to the work of Witold Lutosławski, the Polish avant-garde composer (1913–1994), then 58 years old. Auditorium 21 in the main building of the Conservatory, a comparatively big hall, was almost full: students, teachers and other interested persons crowded its seats. It was exciting to be on the podium, looking at the large audience. Stress, however, soon got hold of me: the Head of the State Commission (the examining board) was Viktor Beliy, whom I knew first of all as a composer, the author of the famous Komsomol song "The Eaglet" ("Orlyonok"), composed in 1936.<sup>1</sup> Beliy was not a musicologist, and his presence as

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<sup>1</sup> Viktor Arkad'yevich Beliy (1904-1983) was a Soviet composer, member of the RAPM [Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians] since his student years, in the 1920s. He became the chief editor of *Muzykal'naya Zhizn* in 1957. His "Orlyonok" song, praising the Soviet air force pilots during the 1936 Soviet intervention in the Spanish civil war is just one manifestation of his total loyalty to the Soviet

the head of the examining board suggested he was elected for this position for a non-professional reason. I did not know then about his role in the RAPM,<sup>2</sup> nor about his involvement with many former ideological-political campaigns. As Yekaterina Vlasova described later in her seminal book, infamous events similar to the ones which had taken place in 1948, had been carried out twice before, in 1929–1931 and in 1932–1936, and Beliy had one of the leading roles in those earlier events which were, in fact, “rehearsals” toward the 1948 so-called “anti-formalist campaign.”<sup>3</sup> By 1971 Viktor Beliy was an established public figure, known as the chief editor of the popular magazine *Muzykal'naya Zhizn'*, and a veteran representative of “anti-formalist” (which meant anti-modernist and anti-avantgarde) views.

As I looked at the pale face of my thesis supervisor, Yury Kholopov, before I began the defense of my Master's Thesis, I understood that I was in a rather problematic, not to mention dangerous, position. Throughout the defense it became crystal clear that I was presented as a promoter of the avant-garde music, an image that utterly endangered my graduation.

### **A historical reference**

While looking back to 1971, the question could be asked: why were my teacher and I so stressed? What did our agitation have in common with the events of 1948? To explain the reason for our stress, one has to turn to the past, i.e., to the lesser-known details of the 1948/49 events. In this context, it is very important to keep in mind that usually, when discussing these events, we refer to the grim experience of some of the best Soviet composers. We pay far less attention to the destinies of the musicologists and thus do not do proper justice to our own profession. The losses that musicologists have endured, personally as well as professionally, were irreparable.<sup>4</sup> Reading the

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regime (See John McCannon, “Soviet Intervention in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: a Reexamination,” *Russian History* 22, no. 2, 1995: 154–180).

<sup>2</sup> RAPM—the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians—was a musicians union founded in June 1923. Its members advocated “mass songs” for choirs (preferably sung in unison) and easily accessible melodies inspired by folk tunes or marches.

<sup>3</sup> See Yekaterina S. Vlasova, *1948 god v sovetskoy muzike* [The Year 1948 in Soviet Music], (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2010) (in Russian). In her book, Vlasova called the events of 1929/1931 and 1932/1936 the first and second rehearsals toward 1948. Beliy's role as an RAPM activist is also mentioned in Marina Frolova-Walker's *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics*, (New-Haven: Yale University Press, 2016):137, and in Richard Taruskin's *Defining Russia Musically*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995):93. As for the “purges” of 1929–1931, these addressed mainly literary figures. Among the lucky ones who were (temporarily) allowed to live were Boris Pil'nyak (1894–1938, executed by court order) and Yevgeni Zamyatin (1884–1937, emigrated and died in France), and the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who was exiled to Kazakhstan (by a special concession). In 1932 all the independent art organizations were dissolved (Taruskin, *Defining Russia...*, 94). Finally, the destruction of Shostakovich's career in January 1936 is a famous story, which was only part of a larger, massive “purge” of musicians and artists.

<sup>4</sup> Yekaterina Vlasova gave the last, tenth chapter of her above-mentioned book the title “Musicologists on Trial.” This title referenced the formulation by Marian Koval', an active member of RAPM, and, between 1948 and 1952, the main editor of the journal *Soviet Music*; his own articles were written in the style of political denunciation. We must remember that the 1949 events destroyed the futures of many musicologists. Not everyone who had been among those severely criticized was fortunate enough to return to his or her job, even in the time of the “Thaw” after Stalin's death.

recollections of Inna Barsova,<sup>5</sup> we can trace and reveal the main points of the attacks on the young generation of scholars at that time.

***In Barsova's own words:***<sup>6</sup>

- Tell us about the events of 1948 at the Conservatory.

1948... I can tell, of course. All of us, including students (I was in my second year), were impelled into classroom number 21. There, where we were taught Marxism. And there they arranged a public display of repentance. All formalists had to repent. Who were these formalists? Shebalin. He was the Rector of the Conservatory. He did not go there and was simply fired. Among the accused were our teachers, Igor Vladimirovich Sposobin<sup>7</sup> and Berkov<sup>8</sup>... And those enacting the pogrom were mainly former members of RAPM ... It was a terrifying spectacle.

- And what did they say?

- That this is not music, not musicology—this is Formalism. What was Igor Vladimirovich faulted for? For the textbook “Musical form.” I do not remember what they said. I remember that it was a kind of a slander. Just a snitch. Formalism is anti-nationalism, that is that. I remember the horror that seized us all. Then Igor Vladimirovich came out, after he was barked at... He was the main hero. He got out and said: “Everything happens at the level of a communal kitchen,<sup>9</sup> and I have nothing to repent for.” And he left. On that very day he had a heart attack. His health waned over this. He died in 1953. This tribunal... It was absolutely horrendous.

Then they started asking students—first year students, second year students. We all sat in one row. “What can you tell?”

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<sup>5</sup> Inna Alexeevna Barsova (born 1927), is a professor at the Moscow Conservatory and one of the world leading authorities on Mahler. She also published a book *Kontury stoletiya: Iz istorii russkoy muzyki XX veka*. [*The Contours of the Century. From the History of Russian Music of the XX century*. (Sankt-Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2007), and papers, among others on Dmitri Shostakovich, Moisey Weinberg, Aleksander Mosolov, Edison Denisov, and Alban Berg.

<sup>6</sup> *Orkestra*: Festschrift for Inna Barsova. Edited by Gregory Lyzhov, Daniil Petrov, and Svetlana Savenko. (Moscow: Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, 2002): pp. 18-20 (in Russian).

<sup>7</sup> Igor Vladimirovich Sposobin (1900-1954) was a musicologist and musical educator. Since 1924 taught music theory at the Moscow Conservatory. In 1943–1948 acted as the Head of the Department of Music Theory. He wrote textbooks on harmony, analysis of musical forms, elementary music theory and ear training manuals. His book on harmony were used all over the Soviet Union and to this day in China (see Nikola Komatović, “The survival of Igor Sposobin: When a theory outlives its time and purpose,” conference paper at Joint Meeting of the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory, The Royal Society for Music History of the Netherlands, and the Royal Society for Music History of Belgium at Royal Conservatory of Music in The Hague, Netherlands on February 28, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Viktor Osipovich Berkov (1907–1975) was a musicologist; taught theory and harmony at the Moscow Conservatory (1938-1949, 1954-56), and from 1946 also at the Gnessin Institute. His research focused on the problems of theory, harmony and form, including studies of Beethoven, Glinka, Rachmaninov, Skryabin, and Prokofiev. His interest in new music continued in spite of all obstacles [see, for example, his article on the chamber music of Alexander Pirumov (1930–1995): “Kamernaya muzika Pirumova,” *Muzika i sovremennost*, 2 (1963), 177–98].

<sup>9</sup> The expression “communal kitchen” has become a point of reference in Russian, referring to the Soviet communal apartment in which several families had to live together and share the same kitchen. Sposobin’s specific reference to “a communal kitchen” might have alluded to a 1924 short story, “Nervniye lyudi” [Nervous People] by the very popular satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko (see note 22 below), about a ridiculously trivial argument that grew into a chaotic fist fight involving all tenants in the narrow communal kitchen.

Then Grisha Golovinsky<sup>10</sup> gets up (we all forgot about it, only Olya Levtonova<sup>11</sup> reminded us at our last meeting, and even Grisha himself forgot), he gets up and says: “You know, we are just starting our studies. We have the best impression of our teachers. We cannot say anything.” That’s all. And so, we were not approached anymore.

In 1949, again in classroom no. 21, there was another assembly, this time about cosmopolitans. Basically, about Jews. This time they crashed Lev Abramovich Mazel.<sup>12</sup> He was accused of groveling before the West, in that too much Western music was being surveyed while teaching too little of Russian music. Besides, Mazel handled his answers unsuccessfully. He stepped on and said that yes, indeed, I understand my mistakes, and so on. After that, Klavdiya Uspenskaya<sup>13</sup> comes out and says: “Well, is it possible to believe a person who yesterday thought one way, and after our assembly thinks totally differently?!” In short, Mazel was kicked out from the Conservatory. Valentina Josefovna Konen<sup>14</sup> was kicked out. Viktor Osipovich Berkov was kicked out. Boris Veniaminovich Levik<sup>15</sup> was kicked out. Why was he kicked out? Levik surveyed with us Brahms’s German Requiem. He translated for us the text of the Requiem from German. And suddenly it turned out that there was a stenographer present in our classroom: our one and only conservatory stenographer.<sup>16</sup> She, obviously, wrote everything down. And Levik was expelled. Then there was Daniel

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<sup>10</sup> Grigory L’vovich Golovinsky (1923–2002) was a musicologist and music critic. Wrote books and articles on Borodin, Mussorgsky and Tchaikovsky; in his monograph *Composer and Folklore* (1981) Golovinsky focused on connections and influences of 19<sup>th</sup> century music on the 20<sup>th</sup> century composers including Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartok.

<sup>11</sup> Ol’ga Vladimirovna Levtonova (born 1926) is a musicologist. Her articles focused mainly on 20<sup>th</sup> century composers: Skryabin, Shostakovich, and Sergey Slonimsky. She also wrote equirhythmic translations of vocal compositions into Russian.

<sup>12</sup> Lev (Leo) Abramovich Mazel’ (1907–2000), musicologist and theorist, among the founders of the Soviet/Russian music theory tradition. He introduced the history of systems of music theory into the Moscow Conservatory curriculum, where he taught from 1931 until 1967 (although he was expelled 1949–1954 on charges of formalism and cosmopolitanism). He continued teaching until 1967 as professor at the Institute of Military Conductors. One of the main aspects of his research was the study of Musical Style; his books *On Melody* (1952) and *Structures of Musical Works* (1960, second edition: 1979, third edition: 1986) provided, for many years, a basis for Soviet/Russian musical theory. He developed Viktor Zuckerman’s theory of “Integral Analysis” and co-authored with him the *Analiz muzikal’nikh proizvedeniy* [analysis of musical compositions] (1967).

<sup>13</sup> Klavdiya Vyacheslavovna Akchurina-Uspenskaya (1902–1978) was a musicologist and music-education researcher. She taught at the Moscow Conservatory 1935–1960. Wrote articles on Serov, Anton Rubinstein, Balakirev and Tchaikovsky and a book about Russian music history (1958) [see <https://www.mosconsrv.ru/ru/person.aspx?id=129497> , accessed December 13, 2022]

<sup>14</sup> Valentina Dzhozefovna Konen (1909–1991) was a musicologist and pianist. Born in Baku (Azerbaijan), she spent 10 years (1921–1931) in the USA, where she studied at the New York Hunter University and the Juilliard School of Music. Back in the USSR she studied at Moscow Conservatory (1933–1938) and in 1938 joined its academic staff (until 1949). Konen taught also at the Gnessin Institute (1944–9) and at the Conservatory of Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) in 1949–1951. Her research looks at English (article on Vaughan-Williams) and American Music history (including Jazz). In total she authored more than 130 publications on music history, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.

<sup>15</sup> Boris Veniaminovich Levik (1898–1976) was a musicologist. He joined the faculty of Moscow Conservatory in 1930, teaching music history, until 1949. He also taught at the Gnessin Institute from 1946 (during 1946–1948 and 1953–1956 he was the Head of the Department of Music History). His research interests were focused mainly on German Music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wrote many essays and books on German music literature of the eighteen (1961) and nineteen (1965) centuries; a book on Schubert (1952) and a book on Wagner (1977, published posthumously).

<sup>16</sup> The conservatory employed a stenographer who took shorthand at all the dissertation defenses. It was out of the ordinary, though, to record in this way a regular class lesson.

Vladimirovich Zhitomirsky.<sup>17</sup> Viktor Abramovich Zuckerman<sup>18</sup> somehow survived; he rebuilt his course. Our music analysis course always started with Western music, but he suggested starting it with Russian [music]. In general, Zuckerman somehow survived.

I remember how Yury Nikolaevich Kholopov<sup>19</sup> [my future mentor—YK] was scolded for playing some piece by Hindemith during a recess. Dissonances echoed throughout the corridor. He and everyone else were reminded about this for several years at all the Komsomol meetings. This was like a nightmare.

All this carried a political character. It was as if 1946 had returned—with the campaign against Akhmatova<sup>20</sup> and Zoshchenko.<sup>21</sup> Then in 1948, 1949—[the campaign turned to -YK] music. Do you understand? Nobody could be hired anywhere after that. People were kicked out to the streets. Konen went to Sverdlovsk. Mazel was “picked up” by the Institute of Military Conductors. They were not scared. They grabbed a wonderful professor...<sup>22</sup>

You know, we really wanted to be in the Conservatory. When we were accepted into the first year we worshipped everyone. Do you understand what a shock we all experienced? [it was - YK] Absolutely dreadful.

It began in 1948... They stopped handing students many scores, including those by Stravinsky, without a written permission from the dean. The dean was Semyon

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Vladimirovich Zhitomirsky (1906–1992) was a musicologist and music critic, specialized in the music of Robert Schumann and the aesthetics of German Romanticism. He also wrote extensively on Russian composers of the Soviet period, especially Dmitri Shostakovich. In 1948, as part of Zhdanov’s decree and the anti-Semitic campaign against “cosmopolitanism”, he was fired from the Moscow Conservatory (taught there from 1931). Zhitomirsky moved then to teach at the conservatory in Baku, Azerbaijan, where he worked until 1953, then moved to Gorky (now Nizhniy Novgorod) Conservatory (1955-70). From 1965 was a senior researcher at the Art Research institute in Moscow.

<sup>18</sup> Viktor Abramovich Zuckermann (1903–1988) was a musicologist who taught at the Moscow Conservatory since 1936. He established, with Lev Mazel and Iosif Rizhkin, the subject of Music Analysis as an independent study subject, offering a positivist method of integral (holistic) music analysis. See Daniil Zavrunov, “[The ‘Tselostnyĭ Analiz’ \(Holistic Analysis\) of Zuckerman and Mazel,](#)” *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 3 (2014); and “[Defining and Defending Music Analysis in the Soviet 1930s,](#)” *Music & Politics* 14, no. 2 (2020): 1–18.

<sup>19</sup> Yury Nikolaevich Kholopov (1932–2003) was a musicologist who studied at the Moscow Conservatory 1949–1954, and taught there since 1960. His research—more than 1000 items—extended from text books of harmony to articles and monographs about contemporary composers: articles about Pierre Boulez, Edison Denisov, Philip Gershkovich, and more; a 1996 article on “Russians in England: Dmitri Smirnov and Elena Firsova”. His book (with Valeria Tsenova) on Edison Denisov was published by Harwood Academic Publishers in 1997. See a [full list of his research and publications](#).

<sup>20</sup> Anna Akhmatova (1889–1966), one of the most significant Russian poets of twentieth century. shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in 1965. Her artistic output ranges from short lyrical poems to whole cycles, most famously her *Requiem* (1935–40), her tragic masterpiece about the Stalinist terror. In 1946 started an official campaign against her “elitist” and “individualistic” works. She and the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko were publicly reprimanded, expelled from the writers’ union, and their works banned. Her influence on general culture trespass national boundaries, and her poems were set to music by many composers, such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev, Sergei Slonimsky, John Tavener, Arthur Lourié, and Judith Shatin.

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko (1894-1958), a satirist writer, who attained particular popularity in the 1920s as a satirist. developing a simplified dry humor style of writing which simultaneously made him accessible, while mocking official demands for accessibility. After his denunciation in the Zhdanov decree of 1946, his work was banned and he lived in dire poverty.

<sup>22</sup> The personal and professional stories of Mazel, Konen, and Kholopov are discussed in the article by Richard Taruskin, “Found in Translation,” dedicated to the peripeteia of the development of Soviet musicology, in a fascinating manner (see *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, Vol. 16, 2019, pp.19–29).

Semyonovich Bogatyrev.<sup>23</sup> He, of course, gave permissions to everyone. Otherwise, the scores would not be issued in the reading room. The same happened with Mahler, Shostakovich,<sup>24</sup> Prokofiev<sup>25</sup>—they were all “corrupt people.” In 1949, those who had chosen Western subjects switched them. [...]

After the resolutions of 1948 and 1949, studying music even from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries became completely impossible.

- Even Skryabin?

- Of course, Skryabin as well. Yes, in general, in this war against formalism and cosmopolitanism, everything was destroyed. Some students had subjects dedicated to modern harmony. Well, what does “modern” mean? Harmony from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or something, maybe, related to Prokofiev. All of this was immediately forbidden. It was impossible. Understand, it was impossible.

Which points were the most damaging ones in the experiences of the young students in 1948? The first was to see their adored professors being publicly humiliated. It is not coincidental that the highly organized, brilliant scholar Inna Barsova, recalls these events in a “stream-of-consciousness” style: the shock she experienced more than 50 years before this interview took place is nothing less than a major traumatic event. Another crucial point is the demand that the students denounce their teachers, a request that characterizes totalitarian systems. In this context, I highly appreciate the well-thought-out answer of my revered colleague, the late Gregory Golovinsky, which was an example of dignity and courage at the time. The third point was the prohibition of all twentieth century music—including Russian music—not only as a research subject but also as a subject of learning, making scores unavailable unless a special permission was given.

As a result, the young composers and musicologists were forced to ostensibly accept the new rules, while most felt frustrated by them. The famous phenomena of double-speak and even more common double-think—(“How can one survive while expressing one’s own thoughts?”)—became the code of behavior for many. Second, the disparity of the life experiences of the students did make a difference at times. Thus, the recollections about the same gathering in 1948 could be even slightly different, as

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<sup>23</sup> Semyon Semyonovich Bogatyrev (1890–1960) was a musicologist and composer. He taught at the Moscow Conservatory from 1943, becoming the Head of the Composition department in 1944-48. In 1949-50 and 1951-1960 was the Head of Theory and Composition Department. As a researcher of polyphony who authored two monographs on the subject, Bogatyrev was a successor of Taneev’s methods of analysis; researched also the works by Hindemith and Schoenberg. Known for reconstructing and completing Tchaikovsky unfinished symphony in E-flat major.

<sup>24</sup> Dmitri Dmitrevich Shostakovich (1906–1975), world-famous Soviet composer, whose compositions became a symbol of “musical double-talk,” are a favorite subject of international musical and musicological research. The brutal attack (1936) on his opera *Lady Macbeth from the Mtsensk District* affected both his personality and his career. Composed 15 symphonies, 15 string quartets, two concerti for piano, two for violin and two for cello, sonatas for violin, viola, cello and piano, and music for film, theater and ballets.

<sup>25</sup> Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (1891–1953), composer, regarded as one of the major composers of the twentieth century. Composed operas, symphonies, ballets, chamber music and music for films. In 1948 he was denounced together with Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Shebalin, Popov and Myaskovsky for the crime of “formalism”, described as a “renunciation of the basic principles of classical music” in favor of “muddled, nerve-racking” sounds that “turned music into cacophony.”

one can see while reading the recollections of Inna Barsova and Marina Sabinina, who were both my teachers at the Conservatory.

The reader is invited to pay attention to the emotional color of both reports, taking into consideration the age difference between the authors (Barsova was only 21 in 1948, while Sabinina was 31). Also, some of the students protesting at the meeting had participated in the fighting in the Great Patriotic War [the Soviet Union's accepted term for World War II – YK], and these students were sometimes freer in expressing their thoughts (this freedom, unacceptable to the authorities, was one of the reasons for the organizing of political campaigns reigning in the arts and literature at the end of the 1940s).

Looking back, I understand now that the defense of my own and others' Master's theses took place in a room that was exceptionally memorable for the generation of our teachers and senior colleagues. It was there, in the very same classroom no. 21, where the enforced assembly of the Musicology faculty had taken place in 1948, and where the students were taught a "life lesson" in the spirit of the times. Only more than half a century after this "lesson" (and more than ten years after the fall of the Soviet Union!) were the recollections of both musicologists published (those of Sabinina posthumously). As far as I know, these fragments were never published in English, and I therefore feel a moral obligation to present them here.

### ***In Sabinina's own words:***

#### **How we were re-educated**

The year 1948. End of February... The main "formalist" professors have already been dismissed: D. D. Shostakovich and V. Ya. Shebalin<sup>26</sup> (in whose place A.V. Sveshnikov,<sup>27</sup> choirmaster, was appointed Rector of the Conservatory). A general assembly of the entire Conservatory had already taken place in the Great Hall, where speakers poured out quotations from the Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union -YK] from February 10, 1948 "On Muradeli's Opera *The Great Friendship*";<sup>28</sup> they reprimanded the "anti-nationalist trend," ardently swearing allegiance to "realism." Only some anonymous notes sent to the presidium (but, of course, not read aloud), and also vague, but definitely angry, mocking exclamations from the back row cast a slight shade of dissonance on the official solemnity of the "event." And now they have especially gathered us, students

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<sup>26</sup> Vissarion Yakovlevich Shebalin (1902–1963). Composer who taught at the Moscow Conservatory since his graduation (1928), became head of the Composition classes in the institute since 1935, and Rector of the Moscow Conservatory from 1942 until 1948, when he was expelled. From 1951 he returned to the Conservatory and taught composition. Shebalin was prolific composer (and close friend of Shostakovich), and his music is characterized by his culture and erudition. He composed operas, symphonies, string quartets, trios and sonatas, as well as music for theatre, radio, and films.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Vasilievich Sveshnikov (1889–1980), choir conductor. In 1936 founded and directed the Citizens' Choir of the USSR. In 1948 became the Rector of the Moscow Conservatory (until 1974).

<sup>28</sup> Vano Muradeli (1908–1970) composed the opera *The Great Friendship* in 1947. Its plot praises a Georgian revolutionary hero, Sergo Ordzhonikidze. The composer, however, did not take into account that this hero, who originally was close to Stalin, disagreed with the leader during the 1930s, for which he lost Stalin's grace. The attack on Muradeli following Stalin's seeing the opera continued the 1946 "Zhdanovshchina"— the political purge against writers and artists.

of musicology, in order to firmly introduce guiding ideas into our poor heads, which have been poisoned by the infection of “formalism.”

Classroom no. 21. Lectures for all the faculties on the history of the [Communist – YK] Party and on Marxism-Leninism were usually held here, attended by most people; today there are relatively few, because our faculty is the smallest. But the atmosphere is emphatically official, as at an assembly: a long table on a podium, the stern faces of the members of the committee, who one by one ascend to the podium. At first, everything is surprisingly uninteresting; we sit quietly, constrained, and listen inattentively. Klavdiya Uspenskaya, a teacher known for her lack of education (she is a former Komsomol activist and a member of RAPM from the 1920s; she now teaches the history of Soviet music, always making mistakes, such as confusing Myaskovsky with Prokofiev or Shostakovich).<sup>29</sup> A respectable scientist, Yu.V. Keldish,<sup>30</sup> a historian and the author of a textbook on Russian music since ancient times, pronounces standard phrases about the wisdom and usefulness of the Resolution in a tedious, colorless voice. I do not remember who spoke after whom; I do not remember, for example, whether Kirill Molchanov<sup>31</sup> spoke that evening—Molchanov, who became famous for a remarkably spectacular interview published by the main newspapers: “At last I feel creatively free and happy, my soul is singing now with joy...”

The turning point was the speech of a newly appointed secretary of the Communist Party organization of the Conservatory, a certain Semenov, a man with a simple, rough face and extremely uncultured phonetics, either a clarinetist or a bassoonist. He immediately manages to awaken the audience from apathy, when he belligerently announces that if the decree had not put things in order, the music could have reached a complete disgrace: “That way *every* Shostakovich, *every* Prokofiev [emphases in the original—YK] there will write as they want!” the hall literally explodes.

Herman Galynin,<sup>32</sup> a brilliantly talented student of Shostakovich, adoring his teacher and someone with a spontaneously unbridled temper, tries to jump up from his seat; his wife, Natasha Shumskaya and I, sitting on the left and right of him, hang on to him from both sides: “Where are you going?” — “Let me go! I will kill him [that is, Semenov]!!!” I have some experience dealing with unbalanced subjects, and I busily ask: “What are you going to kill him with?” — “With a chair!!!”—Herman yells

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<sup>29</sup> Nikolai Yakovlevich Myaskovsky (1881–1950), composer, teacher at the Moscow Conservatory. Sometimes referred to as “the Father of the Soviet Symphony,” he was awarded the Stalin Prize five times. In 1948 he was denounced (with Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Prokofiev, and other composers) as one of the principal offenders in writing music of anti-Soviet, “anti-proletarian” and formalist tendencies. He was expelled from the conservatory and died two years later.

<sup>30</sup> Yuri Vsevolodovich Keldish (1907–1995), was one of the foremost Russian musicologists. He taught at the Moscow Conservatory since 1930, becoming professor in 1948, and head of the department of Russian music history. He also taught in Leningrad, wrote books and articles on Russian music history, was chief editor of the journal *Sovetskaya Muzika* (1957–61) and chief editor of the *Muzikal'naya entsiklopediya* (1973–82). Keldish initiated the publication of the ten-volume *Istoriya russkoy muziki* (Moscow, 1983–97), nine volumes of which had appeared before his death.

<sup>31</sup> Kirill Vladimirovich Molchanov (1922–1982) was a composer, who wrote, among others, operas, musicals, vocal music, ballets, theater, and films. In 1974 he was appointed director of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. His music follows the Social Realist romantic tradition.

<sup>32</sup> German (Herman) Germanovich Galynin (1922–1966) was a composer, composition student of Shostakovich and Myaskovsky, and theory student of Sposobin. In spite of his musical works being reprimanded by Tikhon Khrennikov, he was awarded in 1950 the Stalin Prize for his *Epic Poem*. From 1951 onward, however, he suffered from repeated attacks of schizophrenia, but in spite of his illness he continued to compose. His musical output includes symphonic, chamber, and piano music.

furiously, trying to pull a chair out of the row in front. Fortunately, the rows of chairs are firmly connected to each other, and the “murder” did not happen, but Herman continues to scream and fight in our arms. And behind me, clutching the back of my chair and pulling it with all his might sits Lelya Kaluzhsky, who was demobilized from the army. Usually silent and withdrawn, he is now hysterically shouting: “Down with it! Down with it!” and shakes as if in a nervous seizure.

The rest merged in my memory into a continuous chaos. The hum, the stomping of feet, the violent mass hysteria. The Presidium was unable to either shout over the audience or calm it down. I returned home completely weakened and hoarse—apparently, I also screamed to exhaustion, damaged my vocal cords and could not speak for three days, only whispered.

Presumably, this meeting convinced the authorities of the prevalence of dangerous moods among the students of the faculty, which meant that some serious “educational measures” were necessary. For students of musicology, the final state exams were postponed until the autumn in order to urgently correct the “mistakes” made in the theses and bring them in line with the wise terms of the Resolution. The situation for composers, however, especially former students of Shostakovich, was more difficult: they were told to prepare new *realistic* compositions for the graduation, preferably cantatas or program symphonic works; therefore, their graduation would be delayed for a year or two, and they were being transferred from the dismissed “formalists” to teachers who were not affected by the pogrom campaign.

(The best option to choose was Professor Yu. A. Shaporin,<sup>33</sup> the author of many wonderful romances based on poems by Blok and Pushkin, but he was lazy, lording it over them...) The worst situation, of course, was for the most gifted ones—Galynin, Boris Tchaikovsky.<sup>34</sup> Boris’s most interesting one-act opera, *Zvezda* (“Star”, composed 1949) was cursed and rejected, because in addition to the “harmful” influence of Shostakovich, the libretto of this work was based on the story by the condemned writer Emmanuil Kazakevich,<sup>35</sup> and the opera ended tragically. This was regarded then as “pessimism,” unthinkable not only when depicting the events of the Great Patriotic War, but also a transgressing a basic rule of “Socialist Realism” Soviet aesthetics. Galynin, however, “rehabilitated” himself with his “Epic Poem” (1950), in which he successfully used authentic folklore themes. While this poem was awarded the Stalin Prize, the trauma that Galynin experienced in 1948 definitely accelerated the development of his mental illness, and in the early 1950s he began to show clinical

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<sup>33</sup> Yuri Alexandrovich Shaporin (1887–1966) was a composer, who started his career in Leningrad, mainly as a composer for incidental music, and also served as the Bolshoi Drama Theater’s musical director. In 1938 he moved to Moscow Conservatory, where he taught from 1938 until his death. His compositions are mainly vocal works, incidental music for theater and for films.

<sup>34</sup> Boris Alexandrovich Tchaikovsky (1925–1996) was a composer of orchestral, chamber and film music. A student of Shebalin, Myaskovsky and Shostakovich, who highly appreciated Tchaikovsky’s works, he generally wrote in a tonal style, with brief forays into serialism. *Zvezda* was composed in 1949.

<sup>35</sup> Emmanuil Genrikhovich Kazakevich (1913–1962), was a Soviet author, poet and playwright of Jewish extraction, writing in Russian and Yiddish. His debut story “Zvezda” (1947) was an instant success and in 1948 was awarded a Stalin Prize for literature. Ironically in the same year Kazakevich published a second story, “Two in the steppe” which drew brutal criticism. Since then and until after Stalin’s death Kazakevich and his works were reviled.

symptoms of schizophrenia. After the war, by the way, there were many cases of “situational schizophrenia.”<sup>36</sup> My cousin had it, but luckily was cured years later.

The least gifted adapted easily. My classmate from V. Ya. Shebalin’s class hurried to remove portraits of his former idols—Shostakovich and Prokofiev—that had been hanging over his bed in the dormitory, assuring all that he had loved and respected are not the modernist formalists, but rather the Russian classics of the nineteenth century.

A funny fact—when this student’s graduation cantata in honor of the CPSU(b)<sup>37</sup> was performed in the Great Hall in the spring of 1949, I almost burst out laughing when I heard the music I knew well; it had been written for a humorous home performance three years ago. (We, in our group, used to produce such performances from time to time. This one was dedicated to the organization of the “voluntary sports society of spinsters,” and the text of the comic anthem began as follows: “Hail to the sports community of elderly virgins, now and ever, forever, and ever!” Now, having radically replaced the words, the composer managed to accurately preserve the melody, texture, even the key of A-flat major, and our “anthem” sounded extremely solemn when performed by the choir and orchestra—no worse or no better than most of the ceremonial cantatas of that time...).

But the echo of that memorable February meeting of 1948 stuck with us for a long time and resonated on one June evening of 1949. We played music a lot, improvised on Shostakovich’s “Jewish songs” (a copy of which was brought by Karen Khachaturian),<sup>38</sup> and we listened twice to Dmitry Dmitrievich’s [Shostakovich – YK] Third Quartet, performed by a group that at the time was called the Moscow Philharmonic Quartet<sup>39</sup> (first violin – Rostislav Dubinsky,<sup>40</sup> viola—Rudolf Barshai,<sup>41</sup> second violin—his wife Nina Markova,<sup>42</sup> cello—Valentin Berlinsky).<sup>43</sup> And all of a sudden, we decided “to greet” the heroes who had spoken at that meeting. Near the

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<sup>36</sup> A type of reactive psychosis, a common phenomenon of PTSD. See, for example, Walter Bromberg and Franck Simon, “[The ‘Protest’ Psychosis: A Special Type of Reactive Psychosis](#),” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, August 1968, 19(2):155–160; and Elizabeth Kuipers, Amina Yesufu-Udechuku, Clare Taylor and Tim Kendall, “Management of psychosis and schizophrenia in adults: summary of updated NICE guidance,” *British Medical Journal* 348 (10–16 Feb 2014).

<sup>37</sup> The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks); in 1952 the word “Bolsheviks” was omitted.

<sup>38</sup> Karen Surenovich Khachaturian (1920–2011) was a composer of Armenian ethnicity (the nephew of composer Aram Khachaturian). Resuming studies after the war, he studied in Moscow Conservatory under Shostakovich, Shebalin, and Myaskovsky. He composed four symphonies, a ballet, chamber music and sonatas for violin and for cello and theater and film music. His music is primarily tonal.

<sup>39</sup> The Quartet was organized at the Conservatory in 1945 as “The Moscow Conservatory Quartet”, but as early as 1946 they performed as “The Moscow Philharmonic Quartet.” From 1955 they were named Borodin Quartet.

<sup>40</sup> Rostislav Dubinsky (1923–1997), the founder (1946) of the quartet, emigrated to the West in 1976; he is the author of the memoir *Stormy Applause*.

<sup>41</sup> Rudolf Barshai (1924–2010). The founding viola player of the quartet (1946). In 1953 left the quartet for a conducting career. He emigrated to the West in 1977, and was the artistic director of the Israeli Chamber Orchestra from 1978 to 1981. He then started an international career, moving from Canada to France, to Britain, and travelling among many other countries.

<sup>42</sup> Nina Markova-Barshai was Rudolf Barshai’s first wife (1947–1953). In the print version of the documentary by Oleg Dorman, about Barshai, he describes her as a wonderful violinist, but of a too stormy temper (see *Note: The Life of Rudolf Barshai*, [Iowa: ACT, 2013] chapters 22 and 24).

<sup>43</sup> Valentin Berlinsky (1925–2008), the cellist of the quartet and its longest time member, remaining connected to it until 2007 by an “oath of blood.”

morning already, we began to call them. In hoarse voices we spoke into the phone all sorts of bad, abusive words...

Was it stupid, senseless mischief, hooliganism? No, rather—a deep, indomitable need for emotional release, a thirst to somehow vent our anger, a protest on behalf of offended genius.”<sup>44</sup>

These memories utterly surprised me. According to the recollections of my parents’ and teachers’ generation, in most cases there was total silence in the auditorium at such meetings; an explosion of emotional protest was something unique at that time. Moreover, today we know that some of those who experienced that pogrom (and worse), had the courage later, after Stalin’s death, to follow their own line.

However, looking ahead to the time of the “Thaw,” with its breath of freedom and creative achievements, not many people pay attention at the fact, that the infamous decree of 1948 *was never cancelled*. Personally, I, too, was not aware of that, and during my studies I was rather poorly informed as well. In the Conservatory Soviet music courses, the approach to the 1948 era and the scandalous resolution was quite short and vague. It seemed to many of us young students, that the events of 1948 were a past, sad story of the Stalin regime’s cruel attitude to the best composers of the time—Myaskovsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Shebalin. We thought that this injustice was condemned in 1958, in a new resolution about the same subject. What we were not aware of then was the fact that the 1948 resolution was not cancelled in 1958, in the time of the “Thaw,” but only softened, and slightly corrected.

In fact, the title of this 1958 document, “About the correction in the evaluation of the operas *The Great Friendship, Bogdan Khmel’ nizkiy, and From The Whole Heart*” speaks for itself. What was in fact “corrected” were “the unfounded and unjustified evaluations” (as formulated in the document) of some specific compositions. Nevertheless, at the very beginning of this 1958 resolution, it was emphasized that in 1948 formalism was condemned rightfully, and that the 1948 resolution played a positive role in the development of Soviet music (sic!). This infamous “correction” was done despite the opinion of Shostakovich, who was summoned to consult with the highest authorities. This “consultation” took place in 1956, at the beginning of the “Thaw.”

While speaking with Marina Sabinina about this meeting with “a highly placed person in charge of the arts,” Shostakovich was very nervous, as Sabinina recollected, quoting the composer’s telling her:

I was summoned by some important person. They are wondering how *to correct* this 1948 resolution... TO CORRECT! To correct something that led the most honest, modest Nikolai Yakovlevich [Myaskovsky -YK] to the grave, broke Prokofiev, and paved the way to various trash... I was at Myaskovsky’s on the eve of his death; he lies gaunt, no color, weak, and asks—unusually seriously, in a quiet, quiet voice: “I keep thinking: is everything I taught, what I did, really anti-national? Maybe there is

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<sup>44</sup> Marina Sabinina, *Sketches from different years*. Muzykal’naya Akademiya, 2003 no. 1, p.21–22 (in Russian).

some truth in this, and we were really wrong”? You see, he suffered before his death, looking for the truth in this vile illiterate document!!!

And I answered this “important” person: “No, not to correct, only to cancel, to cancel categorically, like that depraved inhuman law banning abortions, which cost the lives of thousands, hundreds of thousands of women...”<sup>45</sup>

The 1948 resolution, however, was not cancelled then, and it was never cancelled afterwards, even in the 1980s, during the time of the *perestroika*.<sup>46</sup> It is as if it was forgotten...

### **Returning to myself, and the first act of the play**

...But in reality, it was never forgotten. Moreover, the echo of the resolution continued to make its effects felt quite distinctly well into the 1950s. At times the Soviet reality could compete with Orwell’s anti-utopian works. One concrete example: Oksana Leont’yeva,<sup>47</sup> then a young musicologist, recalls her state examination for graduation from the Conservatory in 1959:

The chairman of the state commission was D.D. [Shostakovich – YK]. The topic I randomly drew for the examination<sup>48</sup> was ‘The 1948 resolution and its amendment in 1958.’ Looking straight at D.D., I had to tell to his face how he had been insulted, badgered, and later on ‘forgiven’...<sup>49</sup>

In fact, the 1948 tragedy (or was it, in some moments, a tragicomedy?) was a culmination of a disaster, but not its endpoint. Reminders of it recurred in Party politics during the 1960s and 1970s. Looking back today to my student years, I believe that the cultural politics in the 1960s and 1970s were inherited, in varying degrees, from the main Communist Party line (the “collective Stalin,” as goes the present-day Russian phrase), presented in official speech during the ideological campaigns of the 1940s. The Party authorities who were in charge of the “correct” ideological line in all the arts, including music, were constantly suspicious of anything radically innovative in the field, especially if it was coming from the West. This attitude changed only in the time

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> The literal meaning of *perestroika* is “reconstruction,” referring to the policy of restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system, in an attempt to end the Era of Stagnation. First mentioned by Leonid Brezhnev in 1979 and actively promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev (see note 50) from 1985, *perestroika* originally referred to increased automation and labor efficiency, but came to entail greater awareness of economic markets’ regularities and the ending of central planning. It was also supposed to relate to greater flexibility in ideological sphere and freedom of speech and expression.

<sup>47</sup> Oksana Timofeevna Leont’yeva (1932–2005), musicologist, specialized in German music of the twentieth century, the author of monographs on Carl Orff (1964, second edition 1984, third edition 2010) and Paul Hindemith (with coauthor Tamara Levaya, 1974).

<sup>48</sup> In Russia, the method was as follows: the Commission prepared exam questions, which were then written on small paper notes that were placed face-down so that the students could not see the questions. Each student then had to choose one of those paper notes and rely on his or her luck. This system is applied to exams from the 1950s until this day.

<sup>49</sup> Daniil Zhitomirsky. Shostakovich. *D.D. Shostakovich: PRO ET CONTRA—Anthology*, edited by Levon Hacobian, (St. Petersburg: RKHGA Publishing House, 2016), p. 391 (in Russian).

of Gorbachev and his policies of “*perestroika*” and “*glasnost*,”<sup>50</sup> which started in 1985 and changed the public dialogue in the then USSR. Until then, studies of modern Western avant-garde composers were never welcome as a research subject in principle, and especially for a young beginner. As was typical to the Soviet era, there was no officially declared ban of such subjects, but anyone connected to the world of Soviet musicology, however young, clearly felt that it was not recommended to enter this field if one had any ambition for a successful professional career.

Thinking now about the time of my Conservatory studies (1966–1971), I ask myself how come that I chose Witold Lutosławski, the Polish avant-garde composer, as a subject? The main reason was my choosing of my academic supervisor. At all Soviet institutions of higher education, all the courses included in the curriculum were compulsory, leaving the students no choice of any individual study focus. We could, however, choose the supervisor of our Master’s Thesis. Such a choice, obviously, also meant choosing between history and theory, between music of the past and music of the modern period, and between Russian and foreign composers, according to the specialization of our teachers.

In those years there was one outstanding teacher and researcher, Yury Kholopov, who was barred from receiving his PhD until 1975, despite having published, in 1967, a fundamental and groundbreaking book: *The Contemporary Aspects of Harmony in the Music of Prokofiev*. Everyone knew that getting a PhD depended on personal relationships within the Department of Music Theory of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Kholopov’s lack of that academic degree was not related to his professional stage; he was widely known in the USSR and beyond. Regardless, formally, not holding a PhD degree himself, Kholopov could not supervise PhD students.

I was lucky to have taken Kholopov’s courses already at the Tchaikovsky Academic Music College at the Moscow State Conservatory as well as later, at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory.<sup>51</sup> Kholopov’s intellectual brilliance, his ongoing

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<sup>50</sup> Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev (1931–2022) was a Soviet politician who served as the last leader of the Soviet Union, from 1985 to the USSR’s dissolution in 1991. His policies of “*perestroika*” [reconstruction] — in the economic area, and “*glasnost*” [a policy of openness in the activities of state institutions and freedom of information] – in the area of literature, arts, and public speech, opened the way to ending the Soviet regime.

<sup>51</sup> Formerly, after graduating from a specialized music school, one could directly enter the Conservatory. This path was open for brilliant young people (usually teenagers) who were deemed to be future stars in performance studies. The other option was to study seven years in a music school while also attending the regular school, and then enter the college, followed by the Conservatory. Today, the professional training of musicians and musicologists in Russia is still a three-tier process, but the talented students who wish to proceed in their music studies need to pass an entry exam to an “academic music college,” which offers a full graduate program that lasts four years. These entry exams are normally held for students age 15, although students from the vocal department are usually older. Its diploma gives graduates the right to work professionally as teachers, orchestra players, conductors, operatic and choir soloists. Alternatively, the Academic Music College can be considered as a preparatory stage for further advancement in higher education institutions such as conservatories and universities. In that capacity, the college serves as an intermediary educational body. The Conservatory grants undergraduate and graduate degrees in musical performance and musical research, offering various degrees including Bachelor of Music Performance, Master of Music and PhD in research. The college also has its own junior division, the Music School. The Tchaikovsky Academic Music College at the Moscow State

research in the field of the twentieth-century music (for which he was censured — see Barsova’s recollections quoted above), his broad, unique erudition and his very special sense of humor impressed the students during his courses, as in his good-natured laconic recommendation, when he lent us rare scores from his own private library: “Please don’t put a hot kettle on it!”.

Without too much consideration of the possible benefits and disadvantages, I decided, rather half-jokingly, that this outstanding teacher “was worthy of an appropriate student.” I therefore went to Kholopov and told him about my wish to be guided by him during my work on my Master’s Thesis. He warned me that naming him as my supervisor might prevent me from entering PhD studies, and asked me to reconsider my proposition. Being young and not too cautious, I answered that my decision was firm and that I needed his consent only. From that moment, our collaboration was settled.

My professional interests were focused on contemporary Western music, and Witold Lutosławski’s works attracted my attention by their originality and refined sound. Contemporary Polish music was known in the USSR mostly via the Warsaw Autumn festival, that served, for Soviet composers and musicologists, as a window to the world. Russian attendees and participants in the Warsaw Autumn Festival brought back to Moscow priceless materials, including recordings, scores and publications of and about contemporary music (especially by the composers included in the festival program). Thanks to the generous help of Edison Denisov, one of the prominent Soviet modernist composers of the time, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the recordings and scores of Lutosławski, and together with Yury Kholopov, now my official academic supervisor, I began my search for relevant materials.

“Together” meant, at times, concrete help. In 1970, for instance, Kholopov brought to me from the Warsaw Autumn Festival, his written transcription of the interview given by Lutosławski to the group of Soviet participants. Such professional solidarity and mutual support were indispensable in times that traveling abroad was restricted, no to say inhibited. This interview was included in my thesis, with reference to the place and time it was presented, as well as cited in later publications of mine.

My thesis on the Polish composer’s work was, for me, both an adventure and a challenge. My knowledge of Polish was minimal, and at that time most of the publications on Lutosławski were in Polish. To properly cite Polish sources in my Russian text, I had to find native speakers who, luckily, were students at the Conservatory and willingly helped me with the exact translations. The few English and German materials related to Lutosławski were easier, thanks to my knowledge of those languages. In his vocal works, however, Lutosławski preferred to use French, which was an additional language for me to study and understand. Here, again, I was helped by colleagues. Mutual assistance with translations, among colleagues, was considered natural: my generation of musicologists usually had to learn just one foreign language.

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Conservatory was given the name of and an official attachment to the Moscow Conservatory in 1936. See also: Alla Toropova, Valeri Brainin, Dina Kirnarskaya and Nelly Suslova, “[RussSME Activity in the Context of Music Education in Contemporary Russia](#),” (2018).

The relatively friendly atmosphere of affiliation between Poland and the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 1970s helped, too. Otherwise, I am not sure whether my subject would have been permitted at all. The permission, however, was given with some reservations, such as the question I was asked more than once: “Don’t you think that Lutosławski is breaking with the tradition?” This question was the first sign for the events that were to follow in my life.

In the spring of 1971, when all my classmates defended their theses and graduated, I suffered an arm injury that prevented me from writing and typing. Consequently, my defense was postponed to the autumn. By then the atmosphere was more tense, and both my teachers and I were aware of the possible complications that my subject may instigate. As had already been done earlier in such potentially explosive cases, I was to be supported by open-minded professors who would be involved in the discussion at the defense session as reviewers of my thesis.

The “first violin part” was played by Marina Sabinina, who spoke with all the temperament of a born fighter. She gave a highly positive evaluation of my thesis and of my choice of subject, as well as of the research methodology, concluding with highly complimentary remarks, mentioning that the width and depth of the work are comparable to a PhD dissertation rather than a MA thesis. Indeed, formally I had no chance to get a PhD for my thesis, but to me her words sounded as an encouragement to continue my Lutosławski studies later, when the PhD stage would arrive.

I must admit, though, that such fervent praise slightly embarrassed me: I did not expect it. I believe, though, that my thesis made such an impression because it was the first analytical-theoretical study of Lutosławski’s style and musical language in the Soviet Union. In addition, while exploring Lutosławski’s pitch organization, texture, and form, I managed to prove the connection of the composer with the principles of his predecessors. This was no easy task, since this style was foreign to most Soviet musicologists at the-time, and it probably helped in overcoming the objections for his being a “modernist.” I also believe that Sabinina appreciated my bibliography, which was in four languages; she knew quite a few languages, but such knowledge was rather rare in my generation of musicologists; to put it mildly, language studies were not very encouraged during Soviet times (unless one learned more languages in order to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or similar institutions, where Jews were almost never permitted to work, from the 1950s onwards).

Still, not everything was celebratory during my defense, in that infamous classroom no. 21. The echo of the 1948 resolution was present, too, and clearly heard, and when Viktor Belyi, the head of the examination board, asked me: “Don’t you think that the work of Lutosławski is destroying the classical tradition?” it sounded as if the time and speeches of 1948 were still with us. I answered briefly: “No, I don’t think so.” All well that ends well, I did get my degree, *Magna cum Laude*, and was encouraged to apply for a PhD program.

My wish and aim to continue my studies seemed, at that time, impracticable, and unattainable then. First, as early as the spring of 1971 I was warned, by a sincere well-wisher professor that I had no chance of being accepted to further studies by my alma mater, because of my being Jewish, a warning that was repeated by my Russian

fellow students, who were only too eager to dispose of a probable rival at the entrance exams for the PhD studies. I was shocked: these were supposedly my close friends! In the Soviet tradition, I was raised as an internationalist and was certain that educated people cannot be xenophobes and, in particular, anti-Semites.<sup>52</sup> However, being rather naïve, I hoped to be accepted for PhD studies on grounds of my academic achievements.

As Inna Barsova recollected of the years 1948 and 1949, in the text quoted above, and as is well-known, the end of the 1940s was the time of the fight against the so-called cosmopolitanism, a then known euphemism for “Jewish.” (The word “Jew” was never said directly, as if not being decent and appropriate to say it in this way, but everybody knew who was referred to as a cosmopolitan). As one may understand from Barsova’s recollections, many Jewish professors were dismissed in 1949, but one of them, Viktor Zukkerman somehow survived. As the professionals’ folklore of the time had put it, for the authorities, having a “token Jew” was a way to create an impression of fairness: after all, not all the Jews were kicked out (and I did hear the same phrase later, in 1971, said on my own account).

The new undeclared anti-Semitic campaign was typical of the “veiled eradications” of the 1970s. The most outstanding performers were usually left untouched, as their performances overs were a source of foreign currency for the Soviet state, that charged them a large percentage of their earnings. Obviously, musicologists were not part of this profit-making group and so were not that lucky: the state did not need us for profit. I was born Jewish, a definition which was legally inscribed in my Soviet passport. There was no official ban on accepting Jews into PhD programs (just like there was no official ban on avant-garde Western music), and there was no explicit quota for Jews at educational institutions, as it had existed in Tsarist Russia.<sup>53</sup> One could claim, however, that the situation in the 1970s was worse, precisely because it was not official: it sometimes felt as if they suffocated us with a pillow, very gently, so that it would not stir up a fuss. In my case, an “inappropriate” nationality was combined with a Western avant-garde research subject. The situation, then, did not seem very promising. As mentioned earlier, Yury Kholopov could not serve as an academic supervisor for any PhD research, which meant that my Lutosławski project was discontinued, to be, however, later summarized in my four published articles. Luckily, though, Israel Nestyev,<sup>54</sup> a leading specialist in the history of the twentieth-century

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<sup>52</sup> It seems that subconsciously I had preferred to forget, that after finishing my college studies, I was the only student assigned to work in Barnaul, Siberia, while all other students were assigned workplaces in Moscow. It was my good luck that I was accepted to the Moscow Conservatory which, according to the Soviet law at the time, meant that I was permitted to continue my studies instead of being sent to work in Siberia.

<sup>53</sup> However, several secret anti-Semitic directives by Soviet authorities had already been issued and carried out at the end of the 1960s, as stated by Joachim Brown, a Soviet-Israeli musicologist. He had the opportunity to read the relevant 1969 secret order of the USSR Minister of Culture, Ekaterina Furtseva (see Joachim Brown, *Jews and Jewish elements in Soviet music*, Tel Aviv, 1978, p.117).

<sup>54</sup> Israel Nestyev (1911–1993), musicologist, teacher at the Moscow Conservatory and senior researcher at the Institute of Arts History in Moscow, editor of and writer in several professional journals, specialized in twentieth-century music. His book on Sergey Prokofiev was first published in English (1946) and only later in Russian (1957, second edition – 1973). He also wrote about Béla Bartók, Hans Eisler, and on twentieth-century Western and Russian music (in 1994, his book on Diaghilev—and therefore, obviously, on Stravinsky—was published posthumously).

music, then professor at the Moscow Conservatory and a senior research fellow at the Institute of Arts History, agreed to supervise my PhD dissertation. His modesty did not allow him to accept Lutosławski as the subject for my research: he felt unqualified to guide such a complicated subject, which was at the time more theoretic-analytical than historical. Consequently, my dissertation (and later monograph) focused on Max Reger, whose music, at that time, was almost unexplored in Russia. Nestyev himself published the first ever monograph on Prokofiev, and always supported my interest in unexplored or under-researched topics. His support was encouraging: it signaled to me that my teachers did not see the situation as hopeless as I felt it was, and they took steps to help me find my professional academic way. And Marina Sabinina helped me at every step. Always supportive and always instructive.

There were quite a few obstacles along that way, which at first looked insurmountable. The institution to which I was recommended to apply was The Institute of Arts History; in my mind this institute was on a level beyond reach, and its scholars had a validated fame of being “the best of the best,” each one in his/her field. Both Nestyev and Sabinina were research fellows there and had a high professional reputation. Regardless of my fear, this was my only chance, since the Institute offered its entry exams in the autumn (and not in the summer, as they were at the Conservatory). Would I not be in time for the exams, I would lose my chance. So, my academic anxiety was combined with a sense of urgency.

The official recommendation of my alma mater was the next mandatory step, but, the appropriate committee met infrequently: it was very unlikely to get its recommendation in time. Luckily, the secretary of the PhD studies in the Institute, who sympathized with my plight, found a loophole in the instructions which permitted a recommendation from the musicology (history-theory-composition) faculty, rather than from the whole institution’s. The Dean of the faculty, Professor Theodor Müller,<sup>55</sup> was willing to help and obtained a positive faculty resolution in a week. I breathed a sigh of relief: the first step toward my goal was completed.

The next step was the stress of urgent exams. To attend the specialty (musicology, in my case) examinations, one had to pass first two prerequisite exams: one on the History of the Communist Party, and the other—on a foreign language. The Institute of Arts History, however, was a research institution and not a teaching one, and therefore it did not have the right to give exams in the History of the Party or in a foreign language. I was therefore sent back to my alma mater to take these exams there... I remember being anxious while sitting the exam in the History of the Party; first, I did not have time to prepare; besides, it was known that “undesirable” applicants were deliberately failed in this exam: it was a sort of ritual... What followed was almost a miracle: the examiner looked at me with sympathy and even compassion, asked some personal questions and wrote on the examination sheet “excellent.” The same happened

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<sup>55</sup> Theodor Fridrichovich Müller (1912–2000), musicologist, who taught at the Moscow Conservatory in 1945–1992, becoming Dean of the Theory, Composition and History faculty in 1959. In 1992 he left Russia and went to live in Germany. Wrote about Bach, Handel and polyphonic techniques, also was the author of several textbooks on polyphony.

at the foreign language exam. Was it personal empathy? Perhaps, I do not know, but now, after succeeding, I was to overcome the next barrier.

Now I had to pass the exams of the “PhD minimum requirements.” These were usually given to students in their first year of PhD studies, a stage which I, obviously, did not reach as yet. I had no idea whether it was proper or according to rules; all I know is that I was told I had to fulfill this demand. Here, however, my “alma mater miracle” was repeated: the examiners looked at me with sadness and understanding and immediately put “excellent” on the appropriate sheets. All those well-wishers were my past lecturers, and they understood (and even told me) that the real problem was my being Jewish. They were relieved that I did not apply to PhD studies at the Moscow Conservatory; in such a case they would have a serious dilemma as to whether help me or not. Applying for a PhD program in another institution would pose less opportunities to accuse people for ignoring unofficial personnel policy and supporting a person of the wrong nationality.

Thus, I was granted admission to the exam in my specialty, which I passed with success. Nevertheless, the person who had to sign my acceptance into the PhD studies program was the Deputy Director of the Institute, who postponed his decision repeatedly. Several respected members of the music department approached him with repeated requests to make a positive decision. As I was later told, he finally said irritably: “We will accept her, calm down and stop coming and asking!”

When I heard the good news, I burst into tears. The secretary of the PhD studies, who had accompanied me for several months, got upset to see tears instead of the joy she expected. However, by then I was so exhausted by the whole process that I found it difficult even to thank this benevolent woman. Years later I read about “learned helplessness,” the theoretical formulation coined by the psychologist Martin Seligman.<sup>56</sup> The uncontrollable, inconsistent and whimsical aversive behaviors that Soviet citizens endured taught them to feel helpless, accept the authorities’ directions and implement them in their actions, without even trying to stand up against them. One needed uncommon stamina, strength and readiness to invest effort in order not to surrender. For me, after this series of erratic and uncontrollable blows, there was only exhaustion merged with boundless gratitude to all my mentors, these rare personalities, who supported me and did not surrender to pressure.

Sadly, this was not the end of the story. Once accepted to the PhD studies, the reactions of my peers were quite varied. On one hand, I was congratulated by my well-wishers; some told me that I was an exceptional case, like that of our revered teacher Viktor Zuckerman, a Jewish professor who was not fired from the Moscow Conservatory in 1949. As they saw it, my success was an example of the authorities’ objectivity, a proof that not all Jews were rejected from entering PhD studies in 1971, just as not all Jews were fired during the infamous 1949 affair. Colleagues of my age

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Seligman (born 1942) is an American psychologist and educator, a strong promoter of positive psychology and of well-being. His theory of “learned helplessness, first presented in his book *Helplessness: on Depression, Development, and Death* (San Francisco: Freeman & Co, 1975) is widely held by many scientific and clinical psychologists.

also congratulated me, and one of them even said (to one of our teachers) that “God sees the truth.”

The support, however, was not unanimous. One of my fellow students asked me with a sneer: “Well, and *how* did you get accepted?” I cannot convey the mockery which I heard in these words. Just as Seligman would have expected, I remained numb. I could not understand the lack of human empathy. Was that replica antisemitic? I have no other explanation.

My PhD studies were not supported by scholarship money, meaning that I had to work, not only for my livelihood, but also by Soviet law: only PhD studies supported by state (scholarship) recognized by the authorities as equivalent to a workplace. A person with no official workplace could be punished by law. My teachers did their best to recommend me for a position in every possible professional workplace, but their efforts were all in vain. The college from which I graduated did not want Jewish specialists, but of course no one would say so up aloud. Luckily, while still a student at the Conservatory, I already had started working as an accompanist pianist at the Gnessin Music College and also had delivered there some theory lessons as a part of the practical experience required by the Conservatory studies. One of the College theory teachers, Valentina Shishkina,<sup>57</sup> decided that I would be a valuable addition to the Gnessin College staff, and in the 1971/72 academic year she had begun a serious campaign to convince the theoretical department to accept me as a music theory teacher.

Just like the process of my application for the PhD studies, this turned out to be a long and exhausting route. I was not a graduate of the Gnessin College or the Gnessin Institute and therefore considered an outsider. The Head of the Theory department at the Gnessin College, a lady of principles, interviewed every teacher with whom I had studied, starting from my first school years. Once again, being Jewish was not to my advantage. At first this seemed rather strange, since the Gnessin family which had founded the Gnessin educational institutions (a music school, a college, and an institute), and where Mikhail Gnessin himself taught and of which he became head in 1945, was Jewish. The results of her inquiry were unanimously positive and sometimes even enthusiastic, not only from a professional, but also from a personal point of view. Regardless, my close Russian friend at the Conservatory was sure in 1971 that the then Head of the Theory Department at the Gnessin college, who was a Russian, would accept her to the department rather than me because I was a Jewish. As happened before, I remained speechless. Eventually, she was accepted in 1971 and I in 1972, and I felt, at the end of that admission process, yet again, exhausted.

To gain an accurate picture of what was happening during that period, one has to remember that the usual practice in the USSR, during the 1970s, was to organize special meetings to condemn co-workers who were leaving for Israel as traitors. To give credit to the Gnessin college, no such meetings were held there. One of my college

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<sup>57</sup> Valentina Vasilievna Shishkina started teaching at the Gnessin College in the late 1960s. During her long career at the college, she taught Solfège, Ear Training, Harmony and Theory of Music, as well as developing supportive techniques for performers. In the year 2020, with the start of the COVID pandemic, and already in her seventies, she retrained in “Information and communication technologies for organizing distance learning.”

colleagues, however, did ask me to sign a letter of condemnation. Fortunately for me, my refusal had no harmful consequences.<sup>58</sup>

I received my PhD in 1976, and continued to teach at the Gnessin College until 1980. In 1979 I was appointed to a research position at the Institute of the History of the Arts, where I worked for fifteen years, during which I wrote and published two books, on Max Reger and on György Ligeti, and some articles on Soviet as well as Western European music. The fact that, according to official Soviet statistics, twentieth-century West-European music was the least popular subject for PhD studies and research, made my specialization the least desired—but also the least populated, sometimes to my advantage. Yet, in spite of my relatively secure work position, the complete unpredictability of the ideological directives of the highest Soviet authorities always remained a source of stress and anxiety for me; the repercussions of the events of 1948/49 continued to affect my personality until my immigration to Israel, in 1994.

### **Postscript**

After arriving to Israel, my information about the Soviet statistics was confirmed: the Ministry of Absorption informed me that my field of research was the rarest among the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and that I was therefore quite unique here as well. Presumably, that specialization, not very widespread in Israel, too, was the key that provided me with the opportunity to be included in the Hebrew University support program for new immigrants and later to teach in its Musicology Department. Here, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the events and spirit of 1948/49 became, ironically, one of the subjects of my courses on Soviet music.

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<sup>58</sup> The atmosphere changed radically from 1985, during the time of Gorbachev's "perestroika", there were no meetings of condemnation and no need to condemn people leaving Russia in private; each one was free to express his personal attitude, friendly or hostile.