The (New) Awakening of Soviet Jazz Culture in 1960s

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Abstract

Following the period of lowest political tolerance towards jazz from late 1940s to the death of Stalin in 1953, Soviet jazz culture experienced gradual growth during Khrushchev's Thaw. This essay argues that the jazz awakening in the 1960s was part of *shestidesyatniki* (Sixtiers) movement and that legalization of jazz took part within the frameworks of Soviet leisure activities and amateur culture. In addition, the growth of Soviet jazz was influenced by American jazz diplomacy during the 1950s and 1960s, represented by Willis Conover and his Jazz Hour, and the tours of Jazz Ambassadors.

Keywords: Jazz, Soviet Union, 1960s, leisure, fandom

The three decades usually singled out as milestones in Soviet cultural history are the 1920s, 1960s and 1980s. Under the relatively free and democratic period of New Economic Policy (known as NEP), the 1920s became rich soil for research and experiments in which radically-minded representatives of the creative intelligentsia oriented themselves towards the modern West, and society sought diversion after the harsh years of the civil war. Part of this new orientation was the emergence of jazz as an elitist phenomenon occupying the space of

high culture, along with academic music (Kovalenko).[1] According to the author of the first book on Soviet jazz, Alexey Batashev (*Sovetskij* 8–12),[2] jazz appeared in Russian soil in October 1st in 1922 when Valentin Parnakh[3] with his "First Eccentric Orchestra of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic – Valentin Parnakh's Jazz Band" performed at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts in Moscow.[4]

The 1960s was a decade widely known as a landmark in the history of the Soviet Union, laying the foundations for what we now understand as Soviet culture. The decade was preceded by the rise to power of Khrushchev and the breaking of Stalin's totalist grip, to the relief of the entire society. Khrushchev's secret speech in 1956 denouncing the Stalinist regime helped to inaugurate a period of liberalization known as the "Thaw", initiating a series of changes in Soviet society. The new era in Soviet jazz appeared gradually after the erratic period of the late 1940s and early 1950s. While taking on the associations of friendship between the Allies during WWII, jazz began to attract negative criticism during the Zhdanovshchina decrees,[5] by which the music, along with all Western infuences, was deemed out of alignment with new politico-ideological discourse.[6]

The "landmark" in Soviet anti-jazz rhetoric[7] was Viktor Gorodinsky's 1950 (81) essay "Jazz and the musical culture of bourgeois decadence" from his book *Muzyka dukhovnoy nishchety* (The music of spiritual poverty). The example below demonstrates the author's desdain for the expressive capacities of jazz:

> It [jazz] does not excite a strong cheerful feeling, but, on the contrary, extinguishes and suppresses them. It does not captivate with impulsive passion, but hypnotizes with the deadly cold mechanism of its rhythms, disastrous by the monotony of the paucity of musical material. And even when its task is to act as an agitator, it only deforms to surrounding hysterical screams.

Despite the official disdain jazz refused to disappear. To serve the great public appetite for dancing many small ensembles playing in restaurants and dance halls integrated jazz into their repertoire. Vladimir Feyertag, the most prominent Russian jazz historian, for example, made his living by writing arrangements for two dance ensembles in the early 1950s and managed even to earn enough to buy an apartment (author's interview with Vladimir Feyertag).[8] At the same time state owned estrada-type orchestras integrated jazz into their shows. Feyertag recalls the program of Utyosov's orchestra: "He had a real estrada program in 1951 with clowns, dancers, estrada songs…and suddenly Utyosov sang a song about unemployed Americans …it was proper swing…audiences were excited and asked him to repeat the piece at least three times. I attended Utyosov's concert several times just for that song"(interview with Feyertag).

In July 1957 Moscow hosted the Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students – the event frequently referred to as a turning point in post-war Soviet history. This festival, attended by around 34,000 young people from all over the world, celebrated the moment when the entire Soviet society opened up "its closed gates" to the rest of the world and Western culture invaded the Soviet Union on a scale unprecedented since the onset of the Cold War (Peacock).[9] Also striking was the number of foreign jazz groups attending the festival, making possible direct contacts with jazz on an unprecedented scale. Among the vistors were the American singer Beatrice Reading, the Jeff Ellison Quintet and saxophonist Bruce Turner from Britain, the Dixieland group New Orleans Rome from Italy, the Gunnar Ormslev Quartet from Iceland, Michel Legrand from France, the Southern Cross Jazz Band from Australia, and Polish pianist Krzysztof Komeda (Feyertag *Istoria* 154). The live contact with actual jazz musicians, even though they were not necessarily in the first rank, instigated an explosion of interest in jazz. This was not the diluted jazz influences that filtered into the dance or *pesenno-estradyi* (estrada-singing), style, but music and musicians specifically

dedicated to jazz itself, with a purist fervour, both defying ideological dogmas and rejecting what was regarded as commercial mass culture (Kull *Desyat*).

At the same time, Soviet jazz groups were among those who performed on festival stages and were even among the prize winners. In the category of small ensembles the Estonian group Metronoom was awarded a silver medal.[10] Another silver medal was awarded in the jazz contest to The Youth Jazz Orchestra of the Central House of the Works of Art conducted by Yuri Saulsky where many future leading jazz musicians such as Georgy Garanyan, Alexey Zubov, Konstantin Bakholdin, Boris Rychkov, Nikolai Kapustin, Igor Berukhstis launched their careers (Moshkow "Kontrabasist").

The festival intitated a range of recreational activities for Soviet youth supported by the emergence of a new generation of Komsomol[11] functionaries (Kozlov 101). With the endorsement of Komsomol activists the first jazz club and cafes were opened in Leningrad and Moscow and festivals as major jazz forums were initated in Tallinn, Leningrad and Moscow.

The following pages try to analyse the processes underlying what I call a "new awakening" of Soviet jazz instigated in the late 1950s and reaching its peak with the festival in Tallinn 67. I argue that the jazz awakening in the 1960s was part of the *shestidesyatniki* (Sixtiers) movement and that the legalization of jazz took part within the frameworks of Soviet leisure activities and amateur culture. In addition, the growth of Soviet jazz was influenced by American jazz diplomacy during the 1950s and 1960s, represented by Willis Conover and his Jazz Hour, and the tours of Jazz Ambassadors. The article opens by challenging what is the biggest myth underpinning Soviet jazz history – the so-called jazz ban. The discussion will also show how jazz fitted into the framework of Soviet leisure, and how jazz festivals became the main models by which the jazz culture defined itself, the link between *shestidesyatniki* and jazz fandom, and finally how jazz fulfilled the "American

Dream" for the Soviet jazz community. The narrative rests on historiographical methodologies, incorporating materials from oral interviews, archival documents and secondary sources.

Myths of the Soviet jazz ban

The simplistic assumption, "Jazz was forbidden in the Soviet Union" has become axiomatic in the discourse on Soviet jazz, by which musicians, scholars and lay people, by constant repetition have elevated the phrase to the status of myth.[12] At the same time, however, this presumption has been questioned.

"I am totally against the statement that jazz in Stalin's times or later was banned," claimed Feyertag (*Dzhazovye*) in the opening of his article "How jazz was banned in Soviet Union". According to him no official documents prohibiting jazz were issued and no jazz musicians have been oppressed for their jazz activities. As he said in his ironic manner, "six persons punished but none of them for jazz. One saxophonist for instance was arrested because he communicated with Americans and got records and reeds. During the most severe Stalinist period you could be imprisoned and shot just because you existed."(author's interview with Feyertag) But the society lived under a double standard – if something was publicly forbidden or required, it meant you have to obey it, but at the same time people learned how to pay lip service to ideological cliches while continuing to do what they liked (*A pochemy* 177). Cyril Moshkow ("1 oktyabrya"), Russian jazz journalist and writer, has claimed that even in the period 1946–1955, which Leonid Utyosov later satirically called "the era of unbending saxophones", jazz was not explicitly prohibited – but it was fiercely criticized and it was "not recommended" to perform it.

What, then, are the roots of the phrase and what makes it so persistent? The claim about a "Soviet jazz ban" has been part of the narrative strategies of those who sought to tell

the stories about repressiveness of Soviet governance, by which, because of its Westernness, jazz constantly a suffered under the demonic Soviet system. The trope of the "Soviet jazz ban" can be related to the implicit premise of the argument that popular artistic expression in the totalitarian or authoritarian Soviet era was predominantly oppositional, as Klenke (62) has claimed. This politically driven discourse tends to be reproduced without reflection by scholars whose moral perspectives begin with the superiority of Western democracy. Related to those debates is Rüdiger Ritter's (Between 95) argument about a polarising rhetoric which has its roots in the Cold War era, and produced by the Western world. It posits a dichotomy separating "us" (meaning "The West") from "them" (meaning "The East") and the distinction between democratic countries of the West ("us") implementing "good" public diplomacy and the Soviet Union and her satellites ("Them") simply spreading "bad" propaganda.[13] Lay people who have reproduced the phrase "Soviet jazz ban" have often done so in order to sustain a narrative that juxtaposes heroic jazz and a diabolical Soviet state.

To a significant extent, the allowed/forbidden dilemma also arose from inconsistencies[14] in statements at the official level. For example, based on official documents there have been claims made about the low tolerance of officials towards jazz around 1962 when Khrushchev harshly attacked jazz, describing it as "cacophony", supposedly to the detriment of the jazz scene (Kull *Desyat*). But at the same time the fourth plenum of the Composers' Union in November 1962, devoted particularly to "Soviet song and Estrada music", implicitly endorsed the music by recognising the need to organize jazz concerts and a system of specialized jazz education[15] (Ritter "Jazz").

Jazz and Soviet Leisure

The new awakening of jazz in the late 1950s was reflected in the interest shown in the club movement in the Houses of Culture – the cultural and educational institutions that organized

the leisure of workers. Being part of the *kulturnomassovaya rabota* – literally mass cultural work – their aim was to take care of cultural education or cultural enlightenment, as it was sometimes referred to, of the citizenry, and to change human behaviour, based on the belief that the party was responsible for the control, provision, and creation of culture (White 1). Behind the ideological façade of state control Soviet citizens themselves took advantage of extensive state support and practised leisure in all possible forms.

Since the end of the1950s Leningrad became an important locus for jazz club type activities in the Soviet Union. The first club was initiated in autumn 1958 when around thirty jazz lovers gathered in the Cultural Palace of Gorky with the intention of convincing officials of the palace of the necessity of opening a jazz club. As Feyertag (*Dzhazovye*) explained in his colourful manner,

> We wanted to meet somewhere. The idea formed that the palaces of culture have clubs of philatelists and fishermen, collectors of black paper and white cars and we want a club of jazz lovers.
>
> They say: Why not song lovers?
>
> We: Well, everyone loves a song anyway, but jazz is a difficult art. We are Soviet people, patriots, we want to do jazz officially under your supervision.

The opening event of the club called D-58 (*Dzhaz*-58) was on the 5th of December by drummer and philologist Valery Mysovsky who hung a map of North America on the wall, showing New Orleans, Mississsipi and Chicago – sites crucial in jazz history (Feyertag *Dzhaz ot* 51). In December the jazz fans moved to another location in the Cultural Palace of Kirov where their objective was to develop a new type of club format called the "Club of friends" which began to appear after the Moscow Youth festival with the aim of establishing contacts with foreigners. In these newly formed clubs, under the name of "Section of jazz lovers" and supported by jazz friendly Komsomol activists, jazz fans met regularly for lectures,

discussion and music listening, and organized concerts. Unfortunately D-58 was forced to close after the gala concert with an audience of around 1300 in May 1959, recorded and broadcast by Leningrad Radio with great success. Somebody found it suspicious when singer Nonna Sukhanova sang in English and within a week the club was closed after a radio announcement saying that "Look, *stilyagi*[16] gathered and poisoned the life of the Soviet people with bad music. Where were the ears of the authorities?" (Ibid).

Yuri Vikharev, the pianist and jazz fan, described himself as having done "something impossible" in 1961 when he managed to convince the Komsomol committee to support the opening of jazz club at Leningrad State University (LSU), and furthermore to use the university's "high and mighty" assembly hall for the site of regular jazz gatherings, along with many other recreational activities of the university. "The assembly hall at LSU. Oh my god, who this hall has seen!" exclaimed Vikharev (104) in astonishment, "The great scientists and poets have performed here. Its marble columns have witnessed stormy scientific debates and passionate revolutionary meetings. […] Nothing has changed in this hall for centuries. As it was at the time of Mendeleyev, so it is now." Under the leadership of Yuri Vikharev himself, oceanographer Alexander Zaitsev and geophysicist Georgy Vasyutochkin, the club became the centre of the city's jazz life, presenting regular weekly lectures, music listening and performances of the club's ensemble with formats ranging from a trio to a sextet. Inspired by LSU many other universities initiated jazz activities. Among those were the Leningrad Institute of Fine Mechanics and Optics (LITMO), Leningrad's Electrotechnical Institute (LETI) and Leningrad's Insitute of Chemistry and Pharmacology (Feyertag *"Istoria"* 157).

An example of thecafé type of jazz club was *Belye notchi* (Light nights) established by the saxophonist Roman Kunsman who catered for the elite jazz café with an exclusively jazz programme. His dream was fulfilled only for a short time following complaints by the

café owners about loss of profits with the decrease of the clientele. The jazz fans who discovered the place preferred to feed themselves with jazz and not with food and drink. Vikharev (184) mentions among jazz clubs *Lepechka* which was the colloquial name for the club in *Dom kultury pishchevoy promyshlennosti* (Cultural house of Food Industry), *Buratino, Ravesnik and Elegia*.

Since 1965, the centre of jazz life in Leningrad became the club *Kvadrat* (Chorus) opened by the initiative of the jazz enthusiasts Natan Leytes and Vitaly Shepshelevich under the sponsorship of the Komsomol Committee in the Kirov Palace of Culture. In the same year, within the framework of 5th Youth Festival in Leningrad, the club organised a "Contest of amateur jazz ensembles" later referred to as the first jazz festival in Leningrad. After the final-round concert the the jury unanimously awarded The Quartet of Roman Kunsman, Dixielad Neva and Jazz Orchestra of Vladimir Segal with diplomas. But not all the aspects of the event found consensus with the jury. The composer Alexander Kolker for example suggested with-holding awards from those who stepped on stage with dirty boots. To his understanding small jazz ensembles should look like the estrada orchestra with glittering uniforms and shiny shoes. There was also disapproval when Yuri Rudenko's group played a fantasy on themes of Soviet army songs, provoking the the question as to the appropriateness of contaminating these almost holy songs with jazzy "distortions". The second Leningrad festival was hosted by *Kvadrat* in 1966 and was the largest ever held in the Soviet Union with twenty-eight collectives playing 128 pieces over four days. In 1967 the Komsomol Committee turned its attention away from the festivals, with its interest moving towards rock as the new object of musical fascination for Soviet youth. In 1968, the members of the club *Kvadrat* initiated the tradition of jazz gala concerts, continuing without interruption until the 1990s. The club functioned as a unique jazz community builder, connecting different

generations of musicians and jazz fans, and as a centre for jazz education with lectures by Valery Mysovsky, Georgy Vasyutochkin and Feyertag (Feyertag *Dzhaz ot* 64–65).

In 1965 *Kvadrat* became a founding centre for professional jazz criticism and jazz scholarship in the Soviet Union by launching the journal of the same name. It appeared as a bulletin for Leningrad's jazz festivals in 1965 and 1966. The rationale given for the first three issues was explained by editor of the journal Yefim Barban (Sharyi): "We convinced the Komsomol members of the necessity of such a newsletter. For the Komsomol such a publication could become an ideological weapon against harmful influences." However, after a couple of years the Komsomol members withdrew their support for the journal and all subsequent issues until 1984 appeared in the format of a *samizdat* [17] typewritten magazine with a print run of up to sixty copies per issue. Komsomol nevertheless continued to shield the magazine from KGB surveillance indirectly by the continued use of magazine covers, once printed in huge quantities, identifying the Komsomol as a publisher (Barban). The last three numbers were, however, issued indicating "Creative jazz association of Novosibirsk" as the editor on the covers. This was done for security reasons after one of the authors, Valery Petrov, was interrogated regarding the journal.

The content of the bulletin was intellectually elitist, incorporating theoretical and analytical writings on jazz aesthetics and philosophy, jazz improvisation and perception. The co-authorship of the bulletin included the entire body of Soviet jazz experts and critics: Alexey Batashev, Vladimir Feyertag , Valery Petrov, Dmitry Ukhov, Andrey Solovyov, Tatyana Didenko, Georgy Vasyutochkin, Artemy Troitsky, Alexander Kan, Yuri Vermenich and Yefim Barban. Barban, the editor of the magazine, was praised by Feyertag as the most intelligent of the Soviet/Russian critics. In contrast to Feyertag, who avoids politicising jazz, Barban was an advocate of jazz-as-resistance, considering the *Kvadrat* magazine as part of a second, alternative culture, opposed to Soviet agitation propaganda (Sharyi).

If the New York boppers of the early 1940s had their own 52nd Street, in the clubs and bars of which young, not yet recognized musicians could gather and play jazz, then for Moscow's young 20-25-year-old enthusiasts the equivalent was the youth café-clubs – the evening entertainment sites with live jazz. The decision to open jazz clubs in Moscow was taken at the highest level of the Party. Supposedly the impetus for the jazz café movement was the visit of First Deputy Premier under Khrushchev, Anastas Mikoyan, to the German Democratic Republic to familiarize himself with its culture of youth leisure in late 1950s. Inspired by what he saw in Germany he felt it would be important to arrange similar public places for Soviet youth to meet and enjoy their spare time in a relaxing and friendly atmosphere. As a result, under the auspicies of Komsomol several cafés were founded in Moscow at the beginning of the 1960s of which the most imporatant were *Molodyozhnoye, Aelita* and *Sinnaya Ptitsa* (Kull *Aelita*).

First of the cafés' was *Molodyozhnoye* opened on 18th October 1961. The regular jazz program, attractive design interior and location lent the café prestige and it was attended frequently by Moscow intelligentsia and foreign delegations brought there by Komsomol to demonstrate the quality of leisure culture for Soviet youth. The music for the café was provided by Moscow's hard core and already highly reputed jazzmen, the most significant of whom were Alexey Kozlov, Vadim Sakun, Andrey Yegorov, Valery Bulanov, Nikolai Gromin, Georgy Garanjan, Alexey Zubov, and Konstantin Bakholdin.

Boris Frumkin, a pianist on Moscow's jazz scene of that decade, recalls the café with great warmth:

> It is not possible to overestimate its role. People stood in long queues and it was almost impossible to get in. It was all under the auspices of the *Komsomol* – that's why foreign delegations were frequent guests. Sometimes we could even jam with foreign musicians. It was wonderful! *Molodyozhnoye* also became a centre of

> socialising for musicians. There were groups of musicians with different musical preferences, like clans. If the Parkerians were playing today then no other 'clans' were allowed on stage. If you played bullshit, that's it, you couldn't be on stage anymore. This tyranny is of course everywhere where jazz is to be found. (Author's interview with Boris Frumkin)[18]

A month later, on 25 November another café, *Aelita,* was opened. The venue became especially popular among the writers and poets – frequent visitors were well known figures such as Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Vasily Aksynov, Ilya Suslov, and later Bulat Okudzhava. Among the musicians playing in *Aelita*'s first line-up were pianist Yevgeny Gevorgyan and guitarist Nikolai Gromin.

The opening of *Sinnaya Ptitsa* in 1964 was timed to coincide with the Worldwide Forum of Youth in Moscow, a gathering of youth pro-communist leaders who came from all over the world. Compared to *Molodyozhnoye* and *Aelita, Sinnaya Ptitsa* was more a gathering place for jazz musicians and fans than the site for prestigious visiting acts for the elite. The musical orientation of the club included mostly bebop, although, to satisfy the preferences of working-class audiencees more danceable styles were included in the repertoire. The club was less limited also in terms of geography, welcoming musicians from all over the Soviet Union. Officially the venue was part of the "an enterprise of the public catering system" (Kull *Moya*), that is, the café was supposed to function during the day as a snack bar – a branch of the *Shashlychnaya* (barbecue), a well known site for Muscovites in those years, on Pushkinskaya Square. It did not have its own kitchen and therefore in the evening only a buffet with a modest assortment of drinks and snacks was open. The culture of jazz clubs and cafés spread all over the Soviet Union with sites opened also in Kuibyshev (1962), Akademgorodok (1965) and Novosibirsk (1967).

Jazz Festivals

In the 1960s the festivals became the main public forums to celebrate the music within the jazz community and the only sites where Soviet jazz groups otherwise hidden in the specialist clubs, cafés for a narrow range of clientele, surfaced into public arenas.

The pioneer of the Soviet jazz festival tradition was Estonia's capital city Tallinn, where in 1958 a three day event with twelve local ensembles took the stage at the Club of the Tallinn Plywood and Furniture Factory. The first seminal event however, happened nine years earlier when the composer and jazz fan Uno Naissoo organized the *loominguline kohtumine* (creative meeting) of two ensembles. The festivals in Tallinn gradually attracted participants from farther afield, with two groups arriving from Leningrad in 1959 and the first group from Moscow in 1961. Tallinn '66 saw the inclusion of the first ensembles from Finland and Sweden. And finally, the grand festival Tallinn '67, with twenty-six groups, involving 122 musicians from seventeen cities as far afield as Khabarovsk and New York. The festival established its significance by being the first big international jazz festival in the Soviet Union with foreign guests from Poland, Sweden, Finland and the USA.[19] The political scandal surrounding the visit of American saxophonist Charles Lloyd in the festival became a source of numerous myths associated with the Cold War era tensions involving American Soviet confrontation and mutual propaganda. The importance of the festival as an apogee of Soviet jazz was appositely expressed by Yuri Vikhrev (204) whose provocative metaphor of the orgasm refers to the excitement and the extravagant affective impact and the festival evoked:

> I hope that our educated readers are not shocked by the provocative title of this chapter [Orgasm 67]. I went through all my dictionaries and did not find anything better to describe our state. The Tallinn festival in 1967 was the apogee, the climax and even better – an orgasm of Soviet jazz after which partners fall apart from each

> other in order to consider what just happened and to experience this miracle again and again. I am afraid that we never came back to our senses. Anyway, in 1968 there was no festival in Tallinn. The love affair was over.

Four years after the first festival size event in Tallinn Moscow's jazzmen, inspired by Benny Goodman's visit, decided to arrange their own event. Over five evenings Moscow's leading jazzmen stepped on stage at the Café *Molodyozhnoye*. The jury of Moscow's festival, consisting of Komsomol functionaries and the representatives of Composers' Union, awarded with the first prize to the nineteen-year-old the trumpeter Andrey Tovmasyan who was selected to be a member of the first group representing the Soviet Union in a foreign jazz festival, the Jazz Jamboree in Poland. The Sextet of Vadim Sakun was formed of young stars of Soviet jazz – in addition to Andrei Tovmasyan, it consisted of pianist Vadim Sakun, saxophonist Alexey Kozlov, guitarist Nikolai Gromin, bassist Igor Berukshtis and drummer Valery Bulanov. Their performance was a great surprise for their European and American colleagues, who were unaware that modern jazz was being played in the Soviet Union and that Soviet musicians were not merely copying American models, but also creating their own music based on local traditions. The tunes of Sakun's group recorded and released in Poland became the first recording of Soviet post-war jazz which, however, was never sold in the Soviet Union. The piece by Andrei Tovmasyan, *Mr. Veliky Novgorod* (Lord Novgorod the Great), is considered by Soviet jazz authorities to be the first successful original Russian jazz theme in which a blues flavour and authentic Russian melodies are integrated with bebop style improvisation. (Feyertag *Istoria* 159).[20] The visits of Russian musicians in foreign festivals (Jazz Jamboree in Poland and Prague festival) continued in 1965; in 1967 an entire day was dedicted to Soviet jazz in Prague.

Following a three year-break four jazz festivals were held in Moscow after 1965. Those four years in Soviet jazz are prized by Mikhail Kull (*Dzhaz*) as a period when Soviet

jazz reached a new high level of professionalism: “If we take into account the success of the Moscow ensembles that performed outside the country, as well as at the ‘real international’ festival in Tallinn, and the reviews of the highest authorities about individual musicians and bands, then there is no doubt that the time of apprenticeship is over, and the Moscow (Soviet!) jazz has reached, at least, a serious European level.” The festivals in Moscow played a significant role in preserving and disseminating Soviet jazz, since Soviet record company Melodija released LPs of selected performances.

Moscow’s festival, like all other jazz festivals of this era in the Soviet Union, used the competition format, with jury assessments of musicians’ performance level and the awarding of the winners with the titles of laureates. The origin of the format of Soviet jazz festivals is discussed by the saxophonist Alexey Kozlov (144–145) who was part of the jazz scene of the era. As he mentions in his autobiography, the competition model of jazz festivals first appeared at the first Moscow jazz festival in 1962, where the Komsomol Committee, who arranged the event, established it for the purpose of validating the idea of the festival in the eyes of higher communist officialdom. The model of competition fitted the overall Soviet “socialist competition” project encouraging the working class to work hard and compete with each other. The competitive ranking of amateur musical collectives applied to jazz festivals gave them validation in terms of Soviet cultural practice.

The other distinctively Soviet detail in the festivals’ arrangement was the prescriptions and by implication the proscriptions on repertoire. An element of “Soviet repertoire” was compulsory, either in the form of musicians’ original pieces or compositions based on some melodies of Soviet composers. For example at Tallinn ’67 the instructions required a specified ratio of Soviet and foreign pieces in the repertoire of the participating groups: the preliminary round should comprise exclusively Soviet repertoire while during the final round one third of the songs were permitted to be foreign pieces.[21] This was one of the

typical ideology-driven methods used to maintain the "ideological purity" of the musical repertoire in both classical and light idioms, a way of domesticating otherwise ideologically unsound material.

Paradoxically, this tactic of ideological control actually contributed to the development of Soviet jazz. To fulfil official requirements, musicians composed original pieces which enlarged the expressive possibilities beyond the usual jazz standards, expanding stylistic parameters and giving distinctive voice to Soviet jazz. One tactic in conforming to the constraints on repertoire was to draw on folkloric sources, thus enriching melodic profile, improvisations, and harmonic structures. The other criterion of Sovietness in repertoire selection was the practice of using Soviet "jazz standards" – the melodies written by local composers other. One of the composers whose works were extenively exploited and achieved the status of jazz standards was Isaak Dunayevsky (1900–1955). His masterfully composed bright and fresh "mass songs", a term used to broadly describe commercially popular songs, already became jazz standards during his lifetime. In fact, the process of turning popular songs into jazz standards in the Soviet Union was analogous to the US where songs of the era became jazz standards in the 1920s and 1930s. Dunayevsky is comparable to the famous American songwriters Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and others whose musical heritage form the part of Great American Songbook. The melodies of Dunayevsky were adapted by various types of line-ups. The optimistic and cheeful melodies were appropriate for dixieland and were incorporated for example in the repertoires of the Leningard Dixieland and the dixieland of Albert Melnikov. Dunayevsky originally composed numerous pieces for the Utyosov's orchestra thanks to which the early recordings of the pieces have preserved. Almost all big band groups included his melodies in their repertoire (Livchits 63–64).

Soviet Jazz Fandom and *Shestidesyatniki* Generation

Why jazz fandom appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s and what factors contributed to that, is given further explanation in a lengthy comment by Leonid Pereverzev (as cited in Vermenitch *Moi*):

> Most of our young people of the 50s got to know jazz during a critical period in their maturing, which coincided with the breaking of their whole worldview, that is, when they were in dire need of spiritual support and some kind of new source of faith, hope and love. Young people, lost in the chaos of ideological decay and universal alienation, through jazz suddenly found what they lacked in the surrounding world and even in their parents' home: sincerity, warmth, unconditional support, close brotherhood and a circle of like-minded people. Fed up with the vulgarity of contemporary popular music and the whole culture of social realism in general, they acquired in jazz a liberatingly fresh artistic vision and reflection of reality; the ability to accept facts as they are; caustic sarcasm, testing the strength of every pathetic statement, every self-confident pose each conclusion claiming completeness; finally, indestructible humour, instantly exposing and ridiculing any falsity, bombast, imaginary significance and cautious (and therefore flawed) seriousness.

Pereverzev locates the emergence of jazz fandom in the Soviet Union in the generation that reached maturity around the time of the "jazz awakening" in the second half of the 1950s after the freeze of the late-Stalinist period. Those who picked up jazz as a field of fandom were part of a special generation – the new Soviet intelligentsia called *shestidesyatniki* – determined to reform and liberalise their country following Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. The appearance of new young intelligentsia was relevant to both the demographic prominence of youth during the 1950s and the unprecedented numbers of young people who were in programmes of higher education at that time (Zubok). In the broadest sense, the *shestidesyatniki* can be identified as a generation with elite status,

seeking a new type of socialism "with a human face" with membership that ranged from intellectuals and artists to members of the *nomenklatura* (Kochetkova 53).

The individuals forming the core of jazz fandom were active in a wide variety of professional fields, according to Vermenitch (*Moi*), "Some of them were also professional musicians, but the overwhelming majority consisted of non-musicians who dedicated their entire lives to the promotion of jazz, arranging concerts, festivals and recording sessions, opening jazz clubs, studios and youth cafes, organising photographic exhibitions, and jam sessions."

The following examples illustrate the occupational diversity and the range of fan-based activities of jazz enthusiasts. Yuri Vermenitch, the author of the book on jazz fandom, was an engineer radio-physicist by profession but his jazz-related activism embraced jazz criticism, translating around thirty books, educating, and launching a jazz club in Voronezh. Leonid Pereverzev, known in Soviet jazz history for his early analytical works on jazz and pedagogical activity in the first Soviet jazz education programme, the *Moskvorechye* Music Education Studio (opened in 1967), worked as a design theorist. Leningrad jazz fan Yuri Vikharev organized a jazz club at LSU as we have seen, made his living as an assistant in a cyclotron laboratory at LSU and as a book distributor and taught himself to play piano. In 1962, Vikharev became the first Russian correspondent in *Down Beat* with his review of the visit of Benny Goodman. Undoubtedly the most prominent figure in promoting jazz in Soviet Union was Alexey Batashev, the graduate from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology with a degree in chemical physics and radio engineering. Among his immense contributions to Soviet jazz the most important was his pioneering book "Soviet Jazz – a Historical Survey" (1972), as well as extensive jazz promotional activities in all the media in a diverse range of oral and written formats in the Soviet Union, Russia, and abroad.[22]

Jazz fandom functioned as a translocal community unifying fans all over the Soviet Union, thus enabling the single individual to be part of a wider intersubjective network. This even extended to dress code, which served as a significant element of networking and as an external marker of identification of membership of the "jazz sect", as in an example from Latvian jazz fan Leonid Nidbalsky:[23]

> If I arrived in Novosibirsk, for instance, went to the restaurant … and suddenly heard somebody playing saxophone. When I saw "button-down", it means he was one of us. I approached him and said a couple of phrases. He saw that I too have "button-down". After that he would definitely invite me to stay overnight. It was like a brotherhood. (Author's interview with Leonid Nidbalsky).

Jazz as a Soviet American Dream

A significant factor in the awakening of jazz in the Soviet Union was American "jazz diplomacy"– the politically driven cultural diplomacy endeavouring to use jazz as tool for reshaping the American image globally in the conditions of intense East/West rivalry. From the mid-1950 to the late 1960s, the US gradually transformed or complemented the overt hostility of its relations with the Soviet system with "competitive coexistence" and intensifying rivalry through the third world (Pechatnov 109–112). Part of this US strategy was to include jazz as America's "most valuable export" and "Secret Sonic Weapon", in an international cultural exchange program initiated by Eisenhower. It invested in the "P factor", the "psychological dimension of power", with the aim of improving the global perception of American cultural and political culture in 1954 (Davenport 4).

The first example involving jazz was the launch of the radio Jazz Hour program within the international Voice of America broadcasts in 1955. The most important figure in the success of the program was its presenter Willis Conover who as a mediator between jazz

and its aficionados became a massive jazz celebrity in the entire former Eastern Bloc – an adored figure referred to as a "Godfather of Jazz" (Ritter "Broadcasting"). Particular attributes in Conover's affective impact were his voice, with its sonorous sensual baritone timbre, and the pace of delivery, slow with measured pronunciation. His listener-oriented presentation evoked a sense of intimacy with his audiences, who received the broadcast as if it was directed to them personally. Of special significance was the opening signature of Jazz Hour in which, through the crackling sound of short-wave radio Conover said, as Estonian guitarist Tiit Paulus recalls, his holy words like the pastor from the pulpit: "Willis Conover speaking. This the Voice of America jazz hour". The transfixing effect of those words on Soviet jazz fans during Conover's first visit to the Soviet Union during Tallinn '67 festival is described by Paulus:[24]

> When you have been listening to the gurgling of short wave [radio] in the evenings and then this person is suddenly in front of you…it was unbelievable. And can you imagine what happened when Willis Conover said into the microphone with his famous baritone voice the words which the entire Soviet Union had listened to over short wave radio. It was crazy what followed! This type of thing can happen to religious people…they are like revelations. I cannot compare it with anything else. But during this time we lived in extremely closed conditions and such incidents were like wonders of the world for us. (Author's interview with Tiit Paulus)

Under the guidance of Conover and his Jazz Hour the entire generation of Soviet jazz musicians and fans educated themselves musically. Latvian jazz fan Leonid Nidbalsky recalls how jazz and Conover appeared in his life at the age nineteen when in 1956 he and his friend received Conover's education in the loft of the dormitory in a para-military Maritime College where they both studied:

> There were huge dormitories for 90 people… we snuck out of the room at night, took bread and salt with us and went back to the college. Then we climbed up the stairs to the loft where our old pre-war *Telefunken* radio set was hidden. It was totally broken but we managed to find short wave and there we finally heard the voice of Willis Conover. Those were absolutely strange voices, not like anything else. But I followed these improvisations and later I started to understand the music … When I finished Maritime College, I was a ready-made jazz man. Conover was for us like Jesus Christ is for religious people. Thanks to him we became acolytes. (Author's interview with Leonid Nidbalsky)

The other instrument of American jazz diplomacy was the Jazz Ambassadors program sponsored by US State Department and initiated in 1956, arranging tours of Eastern Europe, the Middle East, central and southern Asia and Africa. The first Soviet tour was arranged in 1962 with Benny Goodman, followed by Earl Hines's group in 1966.[25] However, the possibility of jazz connections between America and the Soviet Union had been first discussed as early as 1955, when the director of the United States National Foundation, Carleton Smith, negotiated with the Soviet Minister of culture, Andrey Tverdokhlebov, about bringing sixty leading American jazz players to the USSR.[26]

The details of how Goodman's tour was initiated are described by George Avakian, the American jazz impressario, in his memoires.[27] He recalls visiting Moscow in the summer 1960 as a tourist for informal discussions at the ministry of culture concerning classical music cultural exchange. As it was a holiday period, he could not meet the minister Yekaterina Furtseva herself but instead her Deputy. During the conversation Avakian brought up the issue of jazz, referring to Tsfasman's recently published article on jazz in Izvestia, and Avakian proposed that American jazz be played in Soviet Union.

The idea was first rejected, but was accepted when Avakian mentioned Goodman as somebody who is able to play both classical and jazz music. When Avakian rose to leave, it was with the distinct impression that when an American musician was invited to tour the Soviet Union, it would be Benny Goodman. What brought about Goodman's invitation so soon was, in Avakian's opinion, the increasing interest from the Soviet side to continue the cultural exchange program between the two countries. Americans had lost interest in going to the Soviet Union under the prior conditions which offered low fees as compared to what Russians were paid by American entrepreneurs. Russians wished to export their culture to America but the Americans took a firm position that without concessions there would be no further tours by Soviet performers. Goodman's tour was thus an attempt at compliance from the Soviet side. Goodman's five week tour of six Soviet cities, Moscow, Sochi, Tbilisi, Tashkent, Kiev, and Leningrad was a great public success although musicians and fans were somewhat disappointed because they expected to hear more modern jazz, not swing. They were nonetheless delighted that the official ice had been broken.[28]

Among the life-long memories of the concert is for example Boris Frumkin's standing in a queue for the entire night to get his ticket (authors interview with Boriss Frumkin). Yuri Vikharev (128) talks about a dismaying experience during a jam session involving both Goddman band members and local musicians:

> We didn't have any illusions about our rhythm sections. We knew that we were behind Americans but nobody expected that the difference is so monstrous. […] Our pianists did not know the standards and elementary jazz language. They were comfortable only in playing blues in F major. Anyway, it was a real jam! It was real jazz!

American jazz musicians also managed to reach the Soviet Union outside of the jazz diplomacy program. Supposedly the first Americans performing in the Soviet Union during

the Cold War period were the pianist Dwike Mitchell and bassist Willie Ruff, who, with the Yale University Choir, travelled to Moscow in June and July 1959, performing at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the University of Moscow.[29] In 1960 Alexey Batashev hosted the NY Jazz Quartet (Idrees Sulieman, Oscar Dennard , Jamil Nasser, Earl Smith) that expressed a wish to stay in USSR permanently and play jazz.[30] As a result of Avakian's year-long private efforts, the Charles Lloyd Quartet arrived in the Soviet Union with tourist visas to play in festivals – first in Tallinn, then Leningrad and Moscow. The festival performance proper, however, took place only in Tallinn. In Leningrad the concert scheduled in club *Pichevik* was transferred to a new venue, since the Quartet was not allowed to enter the hall and in Moscow Lloyd's group appeared in Café *Molodyozhnoye*.[31] In summer 1967 Gerry Mulligan assisting his wife in a film festival jammed with local musicians in *Molodyozhnoye* and Feyertag reports that in 1968 the Illinois University Orchestra visited the Soviet Union.

Boris Frumkin summarises the adoration which greeted US jazz musicians:

> America it was like Alice in Wonderland … invisible, incomprehensible, a kind of phantasmagorical world of thoughts and ideas, a kind of cult paradise. Although we knew that Parker was poor, but no matter, this was a symbol of freedom … we were young. We all wanted to go to America, we wore American clothes and boots, we listened to American records. Some of us left, and went to the free world. Most of them gave up music … People by the way were very positive towards Americans … I think first of all because of jazz. People who made such wonderful energetic interesting music must be good people. But I think it is a mistake that we think if someone is a good artist then he must also be a good person. (Author's interview with Boris Frumkin)

Leonid Nidbalsky takes a similar perspective regarding American influence after WWII:

> There was deep poverty at the end of 1940s. We had nothing to eat and suddenly American food appeared before us … we had never eaten anything like that in our lives before. All those American military cars, food, music, appeared before us … it was our life saver. We were not involved in politics and were not interested. Our point of interest was culture and music. We didn't really know much about America at that time – in our news they said that they are hanging Black people there. But America symbolised the entire West for us at that time. America appeared to us first of all through popular music. (Author's interview with Leonid Nidbalsky)

The great adoration of America and its music by the entire Soviet jazz community was a fulfillment of their type of American Dream expressed in the adoration of Conover, deep love for jazz, and idealization of the America as a cult like paradise. The American Dream – a national self-perception leading to "the good life," a life symbolized by material bounty, security, and moral superiority (Gordon 2) found its way to the Soviet jazz community perceived as contrasting starkly with the Soviet way of life.

For an Ending

Interestingly, those who most prominently invoked jazz in the late 1950s and early 1960s were not in the first instance musicians but *shestidesyatniki*, intelligentsia-rooted jazz fans whose need for a brotherhood providing meaningful human contact led them to form the community of like-minded people in the form of special interest jazz clubs within the culture of Soviet leisure. Those fan-based activities were crucial in validating jazz in the Soviet Union, launching infrastructures for music to be developed and disseminated, and educating through numerous popularizing activities. This translocal network of jazz fans spread all over the Soviet Union and was described in terms of religious sects with their "houses of prayer" – jazz clubs – and listening to their "priest", Willis Conover. Conover's profound impact

entitles him to be called the architect of collective identity for the entire generation of the Soviet jazz community. During his heyday from the mid-1950s and through to the end of the 1960s the idea of "jazz being synonymous with Jazz Hour" and "Jazz Hour as being synonymous with Conover" connected jazz lovers throughout the Soviet Union. That generation of audiences, born roughly between 1935 and 1950, found Conover during their period of intense musical taste formation in their teens.

The sites for mediating musical endeavours of the *jazzmeny-shestidesyatniki* (jazzmen-sixtiers) became jazz cafés and festivals as the most prominent jazz forums in the country. The peak moment of the Soviet jazz awakening in the 1960s was celebrated during the jazz festivals in 1967 and 1968 which demonstrated a high level of professional skills of the musicians and the distinctive musical voice of Soviet jazz. Despite the externally imposed ideological rhetoric, Soviet jazz developed great stylistic diversity, from traditional Dixieland to free jazz, a Coltrane-based style and electric sounds. Apart from a few state owned professional jazz collectives such as the Leningrad Dixieland and Oleg Lundstem's Orchestra and ensembles with regular income in some jazz cafes, jazz groups qualified as amateurs according to Soviet norms, by which the basis for the amateur/professional distinction was not their artistic level but occupational status. Status, in turn, was determined on the basis of whether the collectives or individuals made their living working in stateowned collectives or if their activities took the form of a hobby. At least until the beginning of the 1970s, when concert agencies started to accept jazz musicians on their payrolls, most of those active in the field of jazz were defined as amateurs according to the Soviet norms. Furthemore, festivals as the main public manifestation of jazz culture, were arranged in the Soviet amateur cultural framework as competitions between jazz ensembles.

The peak moment of Soviet jazz marked the turning point followed by the geographical shift in which jazz festival enthusiasm moved from former centres in Moscow,

Leningrad and Tallinn to provincial cities (Donetsk, Samara, Dnepropetrovsk). The reason for the "jazz migration" was rising interest in the forms of popular music in those centres rather than the state's anti-jazz politics, as it has been sometimes claimed. Formerly catering to the tastes of youth through jazz, Komsomol, now did so with new forms of popular music which was accepted by official state owned concert organisations within the format of VIA (Vocal Instrumental Ensemble).

American jazz diplomacy as the stimulus for Soviet jazz clearly achieved its objectives of improving the image of the US and generating Soviet admiration for American prosperity, way of life, music and the people through jazz. For those who self-actualized through jazz in the Soviet Union, their involvement with the music symbolized a striving for fulfillment of their version of the American Dream through its sounds and symbols.

Notes

[1]All translations are by the author.

[2] The pioneering overview of Soviet jazz in English is Frederick Starr, *Red & Hot*.

[3] Valentin Parnakh (1891–1951) was a musician, choreographer and poet who discovered jazz music in Paris when he saw the African American jazz ensemble Louis Mitchell's Jazz Kings in the summer of 1921. His fascination with new rhythms and sounds inspired him to buy a full set of instruments for a "jazz band", jazz gramophone records and to return with a great desire to create a jazz ensemble in his native country – which he managed to do a year later. Parnakh did not play in his ensemble, but danced or in modern terms did a solo plastic improvisation (Moshkow "1 oktyabrya"). Moreover, he invented the very spelling of the word "jazz" in Russian and wrote the first article on jazz "Jazz Band – Not a Noise Orchestra" in which he tried to convince the readers that a jazz orchestra is not simply another *Shumovyi orkestr* (Noise orchestra).

[4] This concert was not, however the first encounter of Russians with American popular culture or jazz. Batashev (*Sovetskij* 7–8) mentions the visit of "Fisk Jubilee Singers", the choir singing spirituals, in 1873 in Petersburg, the spread of modern dances at the beginning of the 20th century and the the record release of Irving Berlin's "Alexander Ragtime Band" in 1911. In addition, Russians were said to be fascinated by the Americans and their culture, especially jazz and the fox-trot', danced to the sound of the latest US recordings between 1921–1923 when, during a US famine relief programme for the Soviet Union, 300 Americans arrived in the Soviet Union (Smith 222).

[5] For a more detailed overview of Zhdanovshchina decrees see Heli Reimann, "Late-Stalinist". For jazz during late-Stalinism see Gleb Tsipursky and Martin Lücke,

[6] Although comparisons with other countries in the Socialist Bloc remain beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the Soviet Union served as a reference point for Eastern Bloc countries' national jazz policies. The example how Zhdanovshchina reforms were implemented in Hungary see Ádám Havas.

[7] For anti-jazz rhetoric in the 1920s, see for instance Frederick Starr, "The Music of the Gross".

[8] Interview with Vladimir Feyertag (b 1931). 10 March 2018.

[9] The World Youth Festival was a youth event under a Soviet-sponsored umbrella organization called the World Federation of Democratic Youth. The event sought to gather the world's youth to meet each other and foster friendly relations between nations. It was for all young people and students, regardless of social background or political engagement. Its program combined cultural activities, sports, games, leisure activities and political functions (Koivunen 1612).

[10] Sirp ja Vasar nr 22 15 August 1957.

[11] Leninist Young Communist League in the Soviet Union.

[12] See, for example, Irina Novikova, Tiit Lauk.

[13] For an essentializing perspective on Western democracies see also Josef Jařab.

[14] Feyertag refers to the practice whereby people say one thing, think another and do the third at the official level.

[15] For further debates see Michel Abeßer, "Between Cultural" and *Den Jazz*.

[16] *Stilyagi*- were members of a youth counterculture from the late 1940s until the early 1960s in the Soviet Union. Against a common pattern connecting jazz fans with *stilyagi* Tsipursky (334) claims that they cannot be equated. *Stilyagi* centralized spectacular non-conformism and expressed a preference for a western way of life. Jazz enthusiasts instead formed a less flamboyant fan community utterly devoted to jazz and generally expressed loyalty to the USSR's system and way of life writ large.

[17] Self-published, non-censored underground publication across the Eastern Bloc.

[18] Interview with Boris Frumkin (b 1944) 16 November 2017.

[19] For the Tallinn '67 festival, see Reimann *Tallinn '67.*

[20] The tune is avalable on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSULxA6kFcA

[21] Decisions and Ordinances of Executive Committee of Deputies of the Working People (DWP) of Tallinn City of the Estonian SSR regarding questions on the Cultural department for 1967. R-1 427. Tallinn City Archive.

[22] For full lists of his merits see https://www.jazz.ru/eng/pages/batashev/

[23] Interview with Leonid Nidbalsky (b 1937). 2 June 2018.

[24] Interview with Tiit Paulus (b 1945). 20 September 2018.

[25] Other tours in the Jazz Ambassadors program were of Duke Ellington (1971) and Thad Jones & Mel Lewis (1972).

[26] "U.S. jazz festival in Moscow? New cultural contact." *Manchester Guardian*, 7 October 1955

[27] New York Public Library. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian's papers.15.15.

[28] For a more detailed overview of the State Department tours and Goodman's Soviet tour in particular see von Eichen *Satchmo*.

[29] New York Public Library. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian's papers.15.15.

[30]Alexey Batashev: jazz writer. https://www.jazz.ru/eng/pages/batashev/

[31] See further Reimann *Tallinn '67*.

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