Second Edition

Music in the Western World
A History in Documents

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Music and Ideology

The following manifesto, by the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), the organization that represented the extreme "left wing" in early Soviet musical politics, presents an interesting (if hopelessly doctrinaire and deterministic) analysis of the post-Wagnerian crisis, and the various early twentieth-century modernisms, in terms of Marxian dialectics. It should be emphasized that this document does not represent an official government or party viewpoint as of 1929. The machinery for imposing party controls on art was implemented three years later, with the establishment of the Writers', Artists', and Composers' "Unions." Official Soviet musical ideology of the Stalin period tended to emphasize nothing like the break with all traditional "classical" heritages advocated by the RAPM, but rather the enforced continuation of the Russian nineteenth-century "national" school. The phrase "a means of communication with people," quoted in connection with the inadequacy of "bourgeois" musical culture, comes from Musorgsky's artistic credo, already cited in this book (see p. 338), while the quotation at the end is from a famous pronouncement (deriving not from Marx but from Tolstoy) by Lenin (real name Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, 1870–1924), the founder of the Soviet state.

Music and the Classes

Reflecting the general evolution of class society, the music of the past evolved along two main paths: on the one hand the music of the toilers, the exploited, and the oppressed classes (the so-called folk music), on the other hand the feudal bourgeois music, which comprises virtually the entire bulk of written "cultured" music.

The position of this or that class at a given historical moment determines the development of these two musical cultures.

The brilliant spread of the musical culture of the ruling classes was determined by its possession of the tools of material, technical culture in the domain of everyday life as in that of the special musical field (complicated musical instruments, special technique of their manufacture, special educational institutes, music printing, etc.).

On the contrary, the music of the oppressed and exploited classes, despite its deep musical significance, remains at a primitive stage as far as cultural, technical, and material means are concerned.

The above conditions give the ruling classes the possibility of utilizing the creative forces of the exploited masses. At certain moments of history musicians of the ruling classes address themselves to the art of the oppressed classes and, taking their most valuable possession, nourish their own music entirely with the vitalizing juice of folk music.

Musical Culture of the Past

Bourgeois music in its latest period (that of the entrance of capitalism into its highest stage, financial capitalism) has reflected the process of general decay and disintegration of bourgeois culture. During this period music begins to cultivate decadent moods, and engages in the following pursuits:

a. Cultivation of sensual and pathologically erotic moods emerging as a result of narrowing interests of a bourgeoisie degenerating morally and physically; cultiva-
tion of musical materials reflecting primitive psychology of the nations, "colonial" exotic music, etc.

b. Mysticism, feeling of oppressiveness as a premonition on the part of the bourgeoisie of the impending social catastrophe and the end of bourgeois rule.

c. Reproduction in a musical work of the movement of the contemporary capitalist city with its milling humanity and industry. This naturalistic streak in contemporary music is a symptom of its decay and of the inner devastation of the bourgeoisie, the inadequacy of its ideological-emotional world to serve as "a means of communication with people" and inspiration for composers. Hence, the so-called "emotionalist" trends in music and, specifically, urbanist music that reduces itself to a more or less successful reproduction of noises.

d. Cultivation of primitive, coarse subjects as a means, on the part of the bourgeoisie, to slow up the process of degeneration and to fight the proletariat that threatens "anarchy" for the bourgeoisie after the Revolution.

The decadent subject-matter of bourgeois music determines its form. Under the influence of decadent moods the inner meaning of music becomes diluted; technical elements gain ascendency and music splits into factions according to its formal elements.

In contemporary decadent bourgeois music the most characteristic elements are:

a. Hypertrophy of harmonic, vertical concepts, resulting in utter monotony and poverty of metrical, rhythmical design, which leads towards distortion of the musical phrase and loss of dynamic power, and disappearance of melos that caused the vocal crisis of bourgeois opera.

b. Hypertrophy of the polyphonic principle, accompanied by complete negation of the modal groundwork of music (so-called linear music).

c. The pursuit of illogical spasmodic rhythms.

d. The striving towards so-called absolute, self-sufficient "constructivistic" music, mechanistically built, and claiming to produce an emotional response of a predetermined nature. The school of composition inculcating this attitude (the so-called theory of "manufacture" of musical compositions) contributes to the complete disappearance of creative urge, replaced by dead mechanical schematicism.

During this last period the bourgeoisie, disguising its class interests under convenient slogans, makes claim to "objective," formal, technical "attainments," rejects the legacy of the classical past, and promotes "novelty," "contemporaneity," and "progress" in a narrow, formal, technical sense. These trends in contemporary bourgeois music, symptomatic of the psychological distress of the bourgeoisie, are a direct result of its decay and degeneration.

RAPM

The fundamental task of the Proletarian Artistic Associations is to establish the hegemony of the proletariat in various fields of the arts.

In the domain of music, such an organization is embodied in the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM), which unites musicians active in the proletarian advance-guards on the various sectors of the front of class war, among them on the musico-ideological sector.

The ultimate aim of the RAPM is extension of the hegemony of the proletariat to the music field. At present it sets the following concrete tasks:

a. Extension of the proletarian education and reorganization of creative talents towards Socialism.

b. Creation of Marxist music, the musical culture of the proletariat, on the viewpoint of the proletariat as historically the most advanced class.

c. Demonstration of proletarian conditions for composition.

In their creative work, composers, members of the RAPM, strive above all to reflect the life of the working class.

Following the dialectical law of the development of art, the proletariat as the most advanced class, born of its artistic subject matter.

The interrelation of content and form.

Thus, while not accepting the "aesthetic" content is opposed to the proletariat, which first of all from those artists, it is the output the subject matter flows.

New musical forms are created.

The role of music must "penetrate into the consciousness, thought and the will of these sections, organizing their class consciousness, as part of the development of the proletariat as builder of Communist society." (Lenin)


Concluding Remarks

The word "totalitarian" was habitually employed by Mussolini and other Italian Fascist leaders to describe the state of Italy under their regime. The term is derived from the Latin totus, meaning a government that is absolute, that is, one in which all aspects of its citizens' social, cultural, political, and economic lives are subject to its control and supervision. It is not a government in which the government is supreme, but one in which government is the supreme authority. It is a government that is the supreme authority in all aspects of life, and it is not a government in which the government is supreme, but one in which government is the supreme authority in all aspects of life. It is a government that is the supreme authority in all aspects of life, and it is not a government in which the government is supreme, but one in which government is the supreme authority in all aspects of life.
a. Extension of the proletarian Communist influence to the musical masses, re-education and reorganization of these masses in order to direct their work and creative talents towards Socialist upbuilding.

b. Creation of Marxist musicology and Marxist musical criticism, critical absorption of the musical culture of the past and of contemporary musical literature from the viewpoint of the proletariat.

c. Demonstration of proletarian musical creative productions and creation of necessary conditions for complete development and growth of proletarian music.

In their creative work, composers, members of the Association of Proletarian Musicians, strive above all to reflect the rich, full-blooded psychology of the proletariat, as historically the most advanced, and dialectically the most sensitive and understanding class.

Following the dialectical and not the mechanistic laws of evolution, composers, members of the RAPM, strive to create gradually new musical forms and a new style born of its artistic subject matter.

The interrelation of content and form is regarded by the RAPM as a dialectical unity.

Thus, while not accepting any form of contemporary bourgeois music that in its content is opposed to the proletariat, the RAPM proclaims the slogan of learning the craft first of all from those among composers of the past who reflected in their creative output the subject matter close to the revolutionary ideas of the proletariat.

New musical forms are created and will be created by the proletariat. Proletarian music must "penetrate into the innermost masses of workmen and peasants, unite the thought and the will of these masses and raise them" for further struggle and construction, organizing their class-consciousness in the direction of the ultimate victory of the proletariat as builder of Communist society.


Composers on Trial

The word "totalitarian" was coined in 1925 by the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile to describe the sociopolitical system introduced in his country three years earlier by the government of Benito Mussolini, leader of the National Fascist Party. It means a government that assumes total responsibility, and seeks total control, over all aspects of its citizens' social, cultural, political, and economic activity, both public and private. No government has ever fully achieved such control, but several have tried, and their priorities may be compared. Of all the twentieth-century authoritarian regimes, the Soviet Union best exemplified totalitarianism with respect to the arts. Through its doctrine of Socialist Realism, it promulgated in theory—and, through its many supervisory agencies, enforced in practice—the requirement that art provide an