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*Such Freedom, if Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music
during the Thaw* (review)

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in order to allow "individuals to speak for themselves" about their American years (p. xi). In lieu of a bibliography, she provides a list of archives she accessed. While this approach enables Crawford to convey the individual flavor of her characters' voices, her heavy reliance on these documents leads to a considerable number of factual errors and distortions. Misremembered or anecdotal information, bi-

ased views, and myths are often uncritically adopted. Editorial errors, however, are few.

Attractively illustrated with rare photographs, the book may be of interest to musicians, music lovers, and students of the cultural history of Southern California, yet it should be read with awareness of its shortcomings.

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ON RUSSIAN MUSIC

Such Freedom, if Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw. By Peter J. Schmelz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. [x, 392 p. ISBN 9780195341935. \$65.] Music examples, illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, interest in the music of the post-Shostakovich generation of Soviet composers escalated in the West. Alfred Schnittke, Arvo Pärt, and Sofia Gubaidulina were at the head of those composers represented at numerous music festivals and special broadcasts. Since this interest blossomed before the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, this music initially had a special cachet. Amid claims that it had been banned in the Soviet Union and the composers themselves the victims of persecution by the late Secretary of the Composers' Union, Tikhon Khrennikov, and even by his effective "deputy" Rodion Shchedrin, it had a unique aura of mystique. The furore surrounding Khrennikov and Shchedrin in this hostile climate—which inevitably grew more heated after 1991—resulted in some rather aggressive exchanges with Western journalists and scholars, and it is only very recently that cautious words of praise for Khrennikov and the difficult role he played have been voiced (see for example Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008]). But following the collapse of the Soviet Union came another collapse: that of passionate interest in the "banned" and persecuted culture of the former communist bloc. Concurrently, the equally passionate dedication to that culture within Russia and its satellite countries also waned. A notable round table discussion printed in the journal *Muzikal'naya akademiya* (March 1999) saw the composers Andres Mustonen

and Alexander Bakshi and the pianist Aleksey Lyubimov lamenting the lack of public interest in new music concerts and the loss of the sense of excitement that had so enervated such events in recent years. Many of the composers and performers who had created the rich vein of what Peter Schmelz calls "unofficial" music during the Thaw years and beyond emigrated to the West as soon as possible, either before or after 1991. Only a handful of those early pioneers are either still alive or have remained in Russia. Other young composers have, of course, come to the fore, and there are now numerous successful contemporary music groups active in Russia (in Moscow, notably Vladimir Tarnopolsky's New Music Studio, Yury Kasparov's Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble and, in a very different mold, Vladimir Martynov's Ensemble Opus PostH; in St Petersburg, "eNsemble," affiliated to the Pro Arte Institute). But for a time in the post-1991 economic and cultural collapse, the mass exodus of talent—comparable to that in the years immediately following the 1917 Revolution—made exciting music-making extremely difficult in Russia, and a strong Russian contemporary music scene has taken time to develop and to form its own aesthetic terms and agendas.

Schmelz's study is a true milestone in Western research into this field. In the first place, he has taken a huge body of repertoire that is in ever-present danger of sinking from public view in the West and brought it forcibly to scholarly attention. As

much care and rigor is lavished on works by Denisov, Schnittke, and Gubaidulina here as we would find in any issue of, say, *Perspectives of New Music* or *Music Analysis*. And not before time: as both Richard Taruskin and Marina Frolova-Walker have observed, Russian (or more properly, Soviet) music has frequently been addressed in isolation in Western scholarship, and with an underlying assumption of its technical inferiority to music produced in Western Europe and America. Schmelz insists that it is by no means inferior, anachronistic or only comprehensible in socio-political terms. Certainly, the deeper our understanding of the society of which this music was once a part, the deeper will be our grasp of what is remarkable about it; but that is by now a truism of contemporary Russian musicology and hardly reflects negatively on Soviet music.

The sheer breadth of musical discussion, then, is a major strength of this book. Another is the oral testimony collected between 1999 and 2007, which supplements, and sometimes contradicts, earlier reports of key events. Yet another is the impressive breadth of cultural scholarship that underpins Schmelz's whole approach: Alexei Yurchak's penetrating anthropological study *Everything Was Forever, Until it Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) is a vital point of contact in Schmelz's introduction, providing the key to his choice of the term "unofficial" to describe the music of the Thaw generation. In brief, he steers deftly around the dangers of either romanticising the music as "dissident" or of wishing to present a crudely revisionist argument: demonstrating that the alleged suppression was not as bad as some had claimed. Schmelz aptly transfers Yurchak's Bakhtinian concept of "vnye" (from *vnyenakhodimost'*, meaning a position of feeling simultaneously "inside" and "outside" of a particular situation or society) to the composers he discusses, thus trying to define the peculiarly intense relationship between the individual and the social in the Soviet Union. Schmelz casts this repertoire within the parameters of this socio-cultural phenomenon, arguing that it was "suspended" simultaneously inside and outside of [the authoritative . . . regime]" (p. 15). The music Schmelz discusses was not banned per se; but nor could composers reliably de-

pend upon free and open performances. To put it another way, it was not "Soviet" exactly; but neither was it "anti-Soviet." It was both, neither cancelling out the other: emblematic of the dual relationship certain Soviet citizens had with themselves and with the State.

The chronological divisions Schmelz chooses for describing the Thaw in the music world are unusual, and arguably problematic. The cutoff point of 1974 is much later than any I have yet encountered in Soviet cultural studies: a commonly agreed boundary is 1968, the year of the Soviets' invasion of Czechoslovakia (the trials of Joseph Brodsky and Andrey Sinyavsky took place in 1964 and 1966 respectively). As Schmelz is of course aware, the Thaw was not an unbroken process even during the mid-to-late 1950s; one only needs to think of the terrible hounding of Boris Pasternak in 1958, which had a viciousness that forcibly recalls the postwar Stalinist attacks on the arts and sciences. Though many cultural studies of the Thaw period differ slightly in their exact boundaries, I have encountered none as broad as Schmelz's. Schmelz's concept of the Thaw in music is complex and arguably contradictory, though that is not necessarily a bad thing. The Thaw "markers" he describes include the premiere of Schnittke's First Symphony in 1974, the exile of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Andrey Sakharov, Mtislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya, the emigration of Andrey Volkonsky in 1973, the bulldozing of a modern art exhibition in 1974, and the death of Dmitri Shostakovich in 1975. Yet they also include a loosening of restrictions on performance: from the mid-1970s this "unofficial" music became markedly less so, even if composers were still often prevented from travelling abroad to hear performances of their music. Whether one can really tie such disparate events together as denoting the end of the musical Thaw is dubious: surely what they more accurately show (and what I think Schmelz is really arguing) is the end of the true "unofficial" period of avant-garde music in the Soviet Union, which was merely coincidental with more repressive indicators of the Brezhnev regime (the exiling of Sakharov and others). Thus, as Schmelz says, there was an appreciable generational shift, with Shchedrin taking on the powers of Chair of the Composers'

Union of the RSFSR and exercising significant liberality within that role (notwithstanding his later vilification in the West).

Another factor in Schmelz's historical approach is his borrowing of Karol Berger's concepts of "mimetic" and "abstract" music. On one level, there is little really new in Berger's ideas, which are, after all, one of the foundation stones of Adorno's writings on music; but as a later writer, Berger usefully extends these concepts to twenty-first-century culture. Schmelz convincingly applies the same concepts to Soviet music, proposing an aesthetic shift away from the extreme rationality of the early avant-garde's serial works to the overtly "mimetic" spirit of music as disparate as Gubaidulina's *Night in Memphis*, Pärt's post-1968 music, and Schnittke's polystylistic works. Schmelz is surely correct in his view that this "softening" of the avant-garde was a factor in facilitating performances of their music: a culture in which art's social responsibilities were so taken for granted—in however abstract terms—could never embrace the aloof abstractions that were so fashionable in the West. He is slightly coy about offering his own view on the appropriateness of describing Schnittke's music as "postmodern" though (p. 322); surely this is one—even the only—attempt to draw Soviet (and post-Soviet Russian) music into the mainstream of Western scholarly discussion. So long as clear distinctions are made between individual approaches (and assuming that the label "postmodern" itself is useful, which is questionable), it seems to me a constructive, rather than negative, way of "normalizing" the discussion of this repertoire, and I would have assumed Schmelz would welcome it. But this is a very minor query: there is no doubt about the fact that this is an outstanding piece of scholarship, rigorously researched and backed by a sensitive, probing attitude to its complex subject.

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A Shostakovich Companion. Edited by Michael Mishra. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008. [xx, 609 p. ISBN 9780313305030. \$170.] Music examples, illustrations, bibliography, indexes.

Writing about Shostakovich has become increasingly like a juggling act. To keep all

the skittles in the air—the life (personal and professional), the background (political and cultural), and the music (in its historical and aesthetic, analytical and critical aspects)—is possible, if at all, only at the cost of frantic exertion. And given that some of these individual topics are already so slippery, failure is virtually guaranteed. Yet to confine the act to only a couple of skittles seems like an easy way out and no fun whatsoever for the audience.

Michael Mishra has gone for the high-risk option. His 265-page essay on "The Life and Stylistic Evolution of Shostakovich," which forms the central part of this book, leans somewhat towards analytical commentary, addressing a lack that he plausibly identifies in the existing literature. But it certainly attempts to keep context and text in judicious balance, not neglecting any dimension that an interested student or amateur would expect him to address. This is in fact the first English-language life-and-works survey of anything like this length for many a year, and it is commendably up-to-date in its referencing (with particular strength in American dissertations). Mishra is independent in his judgments, he moves fluidly between detail and the broader picture, and he adopts a straightforward and unidiosyncratic structure, adhering to the usual chronological divisions and allocating appropriate space according to the relative importance of works. With a mountain of secondary literature to deal with, his prose sometimes gets clogged with dutiful reference to other commentators; yet rarely does his discussion of a major work pass without some valuable insights of his own.

Is that enough? Apart from the obvious facts that not everyone will find Mishra's eclectic approach to their liking on ideological or disciplinary grounds, and that no individual could hope to cover such a range of music and topics without flaw or omission, there are some weaknesses that cannot go unremarked. Even at the top of his game, Mishra's dutiful referencing tends to give the impression of preliminary notes that could usefully have been filtered out as the arguments developed. I for one would happily trade many honorable mentions of those American dissertations for some engagement with a major author such as Levon Akopian, whose *Dmitrii Shostakovich: opyt fenomenologii tvorchestva*