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# Folk songs in Soviet orchestration: Vostokfil'm's *Song of Happiness* and the forging of the New Soviet Musician

## ABSTRACT

*Through the history of production and reception of Mark Donskoi and Vladimir Legoshin's Song of Happiness (1934), the article delves into the transformation of visual and musical representation of the non-Russian 'Other' in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The story of an uneducated Mari villager turned music-conservatoire graduate is analysed in the context of a re-evaluation of the musical heritage and folklore culture in the Soviet Union. By considering different versions of the script and the final film, the article recovers a complex fabric of cultural and national politics looking for blueprints to visualize Soviet culture as 'national in form, socialist in content'.*

## KEYWORDS

music  
nationality politics  
minority representation  
folklore  
East/West

In 1934 Soviet cinema celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. Returning from the Venice Film Festival, the head of the film industry Boris Shumiatskii boasted increased production and international success, cherishing ambitious plans to conquer the world (M. Gri-g 1934). The number of sound films grew

1. The first public screening and discussion (the so-called *obshchestvennyi prosmotr*) took place in Moscow on 22 September 1934 in the Udarnik cinema. The film went into distribution on 1 October 1934. In Leningrad the film was first shown to ARRK film professionals on 2 October 1934 (Fomin 2007: 290–91).
2. The venture proved short-lived due to irreconcilable arguments between the representatives of various autonomous republics over the share of the investment expected from each of them (RGALI 2489/1/1: 85).
3. RGALI 2489/1/1: 91. Its founding members were the Commissariat of Enlightenment of the RSFSR, Autonomous Republics (ASSR) of Bashkiria, Chuvashia, the Crimea, Karelia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Tatarstan, Yakutia, Buriat-Mongolia, Dagestan, Volga Germans, and Autonomous Oblasts (AO) of Adygeia, Chechnia, Ingushetia, Kalmykia, Karachaevo, Komi, Mari, and North Ossetia, and a number of federal organizations. The charter of the shareholding society 'Vostochnoe Kino' was approved on 13 March 1926 (Vishnevskii and Fionov 1974: 38; Skachko 1925: 85).
4. For an overview of Soviet nationality politics see Martin (2001).

exponentially, marking the unavoidable 'victory' of the sound film over the silent movie. In 1934 socialist realism was declared the normative aesthetic at the First Congress of Soviet Writers and Grigorii Aleksandrov's musical comedy *Happy Guys/Veselye rebiata*, built on tested Hollywood genre recipes, was widely acclaimed (Lahusen 2002; Taylor 2000). A popular song from this film claimed that 'Singing helps us to live and to love'. For the 'movies for the masses', extensive use of music and singing appeared to be a universal recipe of success. Music and film, two 'universal' media, were expected to take the lead in spreading socialist culture ever more widely. By the end of the year, a new feature film with a pompous title went into distribution – *Song of Happiness/Pesn' o schast'i* [sic].<sup>1</sup> Produced by Vostokfil'm (East-film) studio, it told the story of a Mari fellow growing from an uneducated villager into a music-conservatoire graduate, exemplifying the transformative power of music and an emancipatory potential of Soviet nationality politics. It inscribed Soviet culture, by proxy of music, within the European cultural canon, at the same time epitomizing an autarchic cultural predisposition of the former. The film marks a quintessential transformation in visual and musical representation of the non-Russian 'Others' which Soviet culture experienced in the course of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Music, musical education and music institutions hold centre stage in this story of the forging of a new Soviet Mari man. This article takes a close look at a largely forgotten 'average' film from the mid-1930s to recover a complex fabric of cultural and national politics, and considers the role that was ascribed to music in educating members of the multi-ethnic society according to the slogan 'national in form, socialist in content'.

### VOSTOKFIL'M: THE STUDIO FOR THE SOVIET 'OTHER'

In the 1920s, Soviet cinematography initiated a unique experiment, organizing a film studio devoted exclusively to the representation of national minorities. While a number of Soviet socialist republics such as Ukraine, Georgia and later the Central Asian republics ran their own studios, Vostokfil'm was intended to serve the interests of the institutionalized minorities within the Russian Federation. The idea was discussed in the Soviet press from the mid-1920s and organizations with similar functions – an 'Eastern department' within Goskino and a film department within the Scientific Association for Oriental Studies – aimed at filling this niche. Following up on an unsuccessful attempt at an independent studio called Ethno-World (Etno-mir), with a similar mission of 'serving' the national minorities (Anon 1927a),<sup>2</sup> a shareholding society named Vostochnoe Kino (Eastern Cinema) was finally formed in March 1926, though it did not start operations until 1928.<sup>3</sup> The goals of the studio were declared at the very beginning to be the production of 'truly eastern' fiction, non-fiction and ethnographic films; the development of cinematographic culture and movie-theatre networks in the national republics; and the development of local film production and distribution (RGALI 2489/1/1: 14).

The creation of the studio took place at the heyday of 'indigenization', the state-initiated policy of promoting local administrative cadres of titular nationality and investing into local cultural elites in each administrative unit (Anon 1921a, 1921b; Stalin 1921).<sup>4</sup> Indigenization aimed at creating 'a pyramid of national Soviets extending down from the large Union Republics to small national districts and finally merging seamlessly with the individual's personal nationality' (Martin 2001: 25). As Terry Martin argued, '[i]t was not the Soviet Union's formal written constitution of December 1922 that

constituted the Soviet Union as a national entity, but rather the nationalities policy articulated in 1923' (Martin 2001: 18). From the start, however, the nationality policy exhibited numerous discrepancies in the implementation of what Martin called the Soviet version of 'affirmative action' policy, bringing to light an ultimate paradox of the Soviet state, which sought 'to maintain equality among the nations and to strengthen the Soviet state, that is, Soviet control over the nations' (Carrère d'Encausse 1992: 217). In the 1930s, the indigenization policy was scaled down and mass repression among the Soviet Union's nationalities started (Martin 1998: 813–61). In the second half of the 1930s, a reversal of the policy resulted in the gradual domination of Russian culture, while preserving the 'affirmative' framework with tacit national quotas (Martin 2001: 26–27). Sensitive to changes in nationality politics as well as to the growing centralizing momentum in Soviet cinematography, the studio went through numerous restructurings.<sup>5</sup> The trust was finally dissolved on 10 August 1935 and its management, accused of overspending and mismanagement, was put on trial.<sup>6</sup>

Internal structural changes notwithstanding, the studio's shareholders and its changing management continuously denounced both the colonial practices of the tsarist empire and the Romantic 'orientalizing' tradition and claimed a monopoly in representing the 'true life of the Soviet East' (RGALI 2489/1/1: 114) arguing that 'the forces that grew up in the borderlands' should have the exclusive right in the present to 'illustrate Soviet life in these national territories' (RGALI 2489/1/1: 90).<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the shareholders clearly saw the commercial potential of the cinema, suggesting – as did high-ranking Party functionary Turar Ruskulov – that they should 'pump money out of the population' (RGALI 2489/1/1: 89–90) to secure Vostokfil'm's growth and development. The tension between ideology and commerce was formative for Vostokfil'm. The notoriously elusive notion of 'the East' was at the core of the tension, at once challenging long traditions of exoticism in literary and visual representation and following the latest ideological guidelines from indigenization to cultural assimilation.

Vostokfil'm intended to use the medium of film to unify diverse nationalities perceived as 'the Soviet outskirts' through a shared political and cultural programme devised in line with the developmental connotations of Soviet nationality policy. The geographical ascription of the studio was challenged already at the founding meeting. A Yakut representative disagreed with a presupposed 'division of culture into the progressive West and the backward East, existing in the bourgeois states and societies' and proposed instead the 'neutral' title 'National Cinema' (*Natskino*) (RGALI 2489/1/1: 95). Indeed, the studio included representatives of the most diverse entities, from Karelia to Yakutia, which made any geographic label problematic. At the same time, its assumed 'enlightening' mission translated in practice into a linear scheme 'from backwardness towards civilization' where modernity, knowledge and progress were brought from the centre. Vostokfil'm thus expanded the 'orientalizing' rhetoric over all the non-Russian population of the Russian Federation, which industrially and technologically did not match the urban centres of the Federation.

Throughout its existence Vostokfil'm grew steadily, attracting a number of established writers, directors and cameramen. At different points Aleksandr Rzheshhevskii, Viktor Shklovskii, Osip Brik, Isaak Babel, Konstantin Paustovskii, Georgii Grebner, Viktor Turin, Aleksandr Razumnyi and other known cultural figures were affiliated with the studio.<sup>8</sup> Following a tacit quota system, the

5. In May 1930 the studio was reformed first into a state trust called Vostokkino and in March 1932 renamed Vostokfil'm. In March 1933 the Vostokfil'm Trust was taken out of the hands of Soiuzkino and placed under the control of SNK; its board director Berd Kotiev (later purged) was replaced by Vadim Atarbekov.
6. On 10 August 1935, SNK RSFSR decided to close down the Vostokfil'm Trust and create an Eastern Section within the Chief Directorate of the Film and Photography Industry (Glavnoe upravlenie kino-foto promyshlennosti, GUKF), which replaced Soiuzkino after the 1933 reform of the film industry. On 13 August 1935 GUKF endorsed this decision (Fomin 2007: 346). To avoid confusion, the studio is referred to as Vostokfil'm throughout the rest of the article.
7. For imperial Russian politics and culture, see Brower and Lazzarini (1997).
8. By the end of 1929 Vostokkino had 67 staff. In 1928, directors Nikolai Anoshchenko and Iulii Raizman, cameramen Georgii Blum and Boris Frantsisson transferred to the studio; in 1929 among others came Aleksei Dubrovskii, Aleksei Lemberg, Vilgel'm Bluvshstein, Amo Bek-Nazarov, Viktor Pate-Ipa and Leonid Kosmatov; in 1930 Vladimir Erofeev, Mikhail Karostin, Petr Galadzhiev, Olga Tretiakova and cameraman Vasilii Moshkin joined; in 1931 came cameraman Grigorii Giber, who had previously worked on chronicles in Sevzapkino and Sovkino (RGALI 2489/1/58: 40–41).

verso). The incomplete list of the Vostokfil'm staff included in the closing balance already contained approximately 200 names (RGALI 2489/1/111: 27–29).

9. Among the themes planned for production in 1928–29, for example, were the 1916 uprising in Central Asia, the Bashkir uprising under the guidance of Salavat, the struggle of Shamil against Russian imperialism and rebellion in Komi (RGALI 2489/1/3: 2). For the difficulties of working on the 'national' themes see, for example, Rakhimkulov (2002: 114–19).
10. The official reasons given for this decision were purely financial: the closing balance of 1935 features high debts and large unaccounted sums (RGALI 2489/1/110). With the closing of East-film, the majority (over 35) of its films were removed from the distribution network by the official censorship organ Glavrepertkom, and 22 others were sent to be 'reworked' (RGALI 2489/1/111: 194–95). Previously censorship had not raised too many objections to Vostokkino productions: in the repertoire bulletin of 1931 only one fiction film about collectivization in Chuvashia was banned (*Repertuarnyi ukazatel'*, Moscow, 1931).
11. After the positive review in *Pravda* on 29 September 1934, numerous other periodicals approved of the Vostokfil'm production and policy.
12. The film has not been preserved: *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my. Annotirovannyi katalog*, vol. 1, pp. 388–89.

studio filmed political meetings and festivities, reconstructions of historical liberation struggles, victories over prejudices and socialist construction sites in different autonomous republics of the Soviet Union. Despite abundant access to commercially attractive 'exotic' material, Vostokfil'm's commitment to portraying 'the East without embellishment' and emphasis on the production of agitprop meant that the studio constantly struggled to make ends meet (RGALI 2489/1/13: 5, 15, 103, 166). The regional network of Vostokfil'm was continuously short of credits and experienced shortages of working space, equipment and sometimes even 'warm shoes for the cameramen' (RGALI 2489/1/52: 97).

Preparing its thematic plans, Vostokfil'm had to adjust to the sometimes unpredictable twists and turns in nationality politics. In the course of the 1920s, the representation of the revolutionary masses and abstract forces of modernity (exemplified by the best-known studio production *Turksib* by Viktor Turin) was gradually replaced by hagiographic stories of 'revolutionary leaders', applying a rigid pattern to different historical periods.<sup>9</sup> Restoration of the Great Russian historical myth led to yet another refilming of history, which ultimately undermined the *raison d'être* of Vostokfil'm. The studio was closed down by the end of 1935, its assets combined with those of Soiuzkino, the major film studio at the time, its staff scattered among other film studios.<sup>10</sup> *Song of Happiness*, released for distribution in 1934 and greeted unanimously as a success in the press, was the swan song of Vostokfil'm.<sup>11</sup>

## WHOSE IS THIS SONG? THE DUE CREDITS

*Song of Happiness* was one among many Vostokfil'm productions illustrating the beneficial impact of the Soviet nationality policy on the cultural development of 'small nations'. Today, it stands out as a characteristic example of a turn from indigenization towards the imperial rhetoric of the mid-1930s. Assigned to two young aspiring directors, Mark Donskoi (1901–81) and Vladimir Legoshin (1904–54), it was produced with limited financial resources and judged by film professionals to be a 'solid average film' (Deriabin 2001). In addition to the team of two directors, the film also had an 'artistic consultant' (*khudozhestvennyi rukovoditel'*) Sergei Iutkevich (1904–85). Being of the same generation as his 'advisees', he had extensive theatrical and cinematographic credits, which included work with Vsevolod Meyerhold, Sergei Eisenstein, the Blue Blouse agitation theatre and the FEKS collective; his substantial work portfolio was crowned by the triumphantly received *Counterplan/Vstrechnyi* (co-directed with Friedrich Ermler, 1932). Iutkevich also had previous experience of working with Legoshin and with some of the actors casted for *Song of Happiness*. While for Legoshin it was a directorial debut, Donskoi had already made five films. One of them – *Fire/Ogon'* (Donskoi, 1931)<sup>12</sup> – probed the 'ethnographic' material, focusing on a southern Evenk community, where questions of tradition and progress were addressed through the opposition between the tribal leader and a young fellow organizing a Soviet council in the tribe.

*Song of Happiness*, like *Fire* and many of their later films, was concerned with individual biography and presented a Soviet version of the *Bildungsfilm*, in which characters underwent a process of ideological maturation from 'underdeveloped' to 'progressive'. Donskoi further elaborated the socialist realist 'coming of age' in his filmic adaptations of Maksim Gor'kii's autobiographical trilogy (*Childhood/Detstvo* (1938), *My Apprenticeship/V liudiakh* (1938), *My Universities/Moi universitety* (1939)), Nikolai Ostrovskii's *How*



Figures 1 and 2: *Song of Happiness*.

*the Steel was Tempered/Kak zakalialas' stal'* (1942) and later films such as *Unconquered/Nepokorennye* (1945), *The Village Teacher/Sel'skaia uchitel'nitsa'* (1947) and *Mother/Mat'* (1955), distilling a canon of Soviet hagiographic biopics (Dobrenko 2008: 201–24; Sergeeva 2001: 161–70). Vladimir Legoshin continued with children's and adventure films, among them *The Lonely White Sail/Belet parus odinokii* (1937), *Military Secret/Poedinok* (1944) and *They Have a Motherland/U nikh est' rodina* (1949), later making his reputation as a dubbing director.<sup>13</sup>

The script for the film was authored by Georgii Kholmskii, an autodidact theatre actor who started his stage career with Konstantin Nezlobin's troupe in Riga and later played in some of Konstantin Mardzhanov's eclectic performances, which combined elements of tragedy and operetta, drama and farce, opera and pantomime.<sup>14</sup> Besides acting, Kholmskii authored various librettos; his *Game with Joker/Igra s dzhokerom* (1927) – a light story of a rich American in Warsaw falling in love with a pretty demi-mondaine and being blackmailed by the imperial 'arms of the law' (its story, albeit set in imperial Russia, is curiously similar to Kuleshov's *Extraordinary Adventures of Mr West in the Land of the Bolsheviks/Neobyknovennye priklucheniia Mistera Vesta v strane bol'shevikov* (1924) – opened the first season of the newly created First Soviet State Operetta Theatre (Iaron 1963: 160). In 1925, he played an episodic role in a melodrama called *Little Bricks/Kirpichiki*, scripted by Georgii Grebner (who was later affiliated with Vostokfil'm), which used the plot of a popular eponymous song. Prior to the script 'Flowing Waters' (*Vody tekut/Viidsõ Joga*) which was renamed in distribution *Song of Happiness* (and had an alternative title *The Mystery of Kavyrlya*), he wrote a script for the short feature *Corpse De Jure/Trup de-jure* (1930), satirizing Soviet bureaucracy. 'Flowing Waters' was welcomed by Vostokfil'm, which was constantly on the lookout for stories from the lives of minorities, but the studio script committee immediately demanded numerous readjustments in the script, which will be considered below.<sup>15</sup>

The film credits the musical score to Grigorii Lobachev (1888–1953) who received his musical education at the Moscow Philharmonic School and was an enthusiastic supporter of the new regime. In the early post-Revolutionary years he was involved in the activities of the Music Department of Narkompros (People's Commissariat for Enlightenment) and composed a host of Revolutionary songs that were recommended to the workers' clubs by the Agitational Department of the State Press's Music Section (Agitotdel). Affiliated with Agitotdel and the Organization of Revolutionary Composers and Musical Activists (ORKiMD),<sup>16</sup> Lobachev combined his interest in 'proletarian' music with his fascination with folklore.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the 1920s,

13. Before turning to directing, Legoshin had worked as an actor/director at the Blue Blouse agitprop theatre and as illustrator for various publishing houses. For Legoshin's short autobiography, written in the mid-1930s, see RGALI 2489/1/105: 134.
14. Kholmskii's unfinished memoir about his first years of work in theatre is preserved in RGALI 2413/1/1060. On his later theatre involvement see Iaron (1963: 104–05, 160); for Mardzhanov see Kryzhitskii (1958).
15. Later the closing down of Vostokfil'm coinciding with the conflict with Konstantin Paustovskii over the script of *Kara-Bugaz* made Kholmskii return to the theatre. At the highest point of his career he headed the Theatre of Satire in Moscow.
16. Ob'edinenie revoliutsionnykh kompozitorov i muzykal'nykh deiatelei (ORKiMD); for its programme see Anon (1927b). On the relationship of ORKiMD and RAPM see Edmunds (2002: 158–64).
17. For more on Lobachev see Ostretsov (1929) and Polianovskii and Vasiliev-Buglai (1950).



18. I would like to thank Andrei and Valentin Eshpai for sharing their information on the first years of Iakov Eshpai's career.
19. Eshpai also mentions his involvement with the film as part of his 'artistic report' (Eshpai 1935: 93–94).



Figure 3: *Song of Happiness*.

he took part in the ethnographic expeditions to the North Caucasus, Ukraine and other parts of the Soviet Union, as a result of which he published numerous harmonizations of folk songs, among them Armenian, Bashkir, Chuvash, Mari, Moldavian, Nogai, Russian, Tatar, Turkish and Ukrainian ones.

*Song of Happiness* was Lobachev's first work in cinema; it was followed by scores to *The Last Camp/Poslednii tabor* (Moisei Goldblat and Evgenii Shneider, 1936) about gypsies in a *kolkhoz* and *Dursun* (Evgenii Ivanov-Barkov, 1941), a love story of Turkmen cotton-gatherers, among others. Although not mentioned in the credits, Mari composer and ethno-musicologist Iakov Eshpai (1890–1963) worked closely with Lobachev on the film score. Eshpai started his work on collecting Mari folk songs in the 1910s together with his cousin Ivan Palantai (Kliuchnikov), credited today as the first Mari composer; he himself was among the first composers to work on Mari folk material (Keldysh 1970: 383–84). He graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire in 1930 and afterwards worked as editor at the national sector of the State Music Publishing House (Muzgiz) in Moscow and as a researcher at the Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History in Ioshkar-Ola.<sup>18</sup> Eshpai and Lobachev had already worked together on various harmonizations of national tunes (Eshpai and Struve 1930). During their work on the film the two signed a private contract according to which all the Mari folklore material was to be provided by Eshpai while Lobachev was responsible for the final score (RGALI 2038/1/231: 28). Eshpai, however, not only provided material for the film's musical score but participated in preliminary research, travelling, according to his personal recollections, along the rivers Yushut, Ilet', Small and Big Kokshaga together with scriptwriter Kholmiskii to secure the ethnographic 'authenticity' of milieu, clothing and material objects in the film.<sup>19</sup> It was in large part due to the available 'local knowledge' that the shooting in the expedition was well prepared and successfully kept within the planned budget, as was proudly declared by the studio management (Mar'iamov

1934: 2). Yet, while the outdoor episodes were quickly recorded, the script continued to undergo considerable transformations.<sup>20</sup>

The title of the script, 'Flowing Waters', is a reference to the eponymous folk song. The script contained loose references to the biography of Eshpai as well as Mari poet and film actor Jyvan Kyrliia (1909–43?), who at the time was Donskoi and Legoshin's colleague at Vostokfil'm.<sup>21</sup> Both Eshpai and Kyrliia were 'living examples' of the early Soviet policy of educating new national elites. Kyrliia was of Mari peasant origin; he studied at the *rabfak* of Kazan' University,<sup>22</sup> from where he was later sent to the Acting Department of the State Institute of Cinematography (GTK, later GIK) in Moscow. In the early 1930s, two volumes of his poems were published in the Mari language (Ipai and Kyrliia 1931; Kyrliia 1932). His debut in the first Soviet talkie – Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life/Puteoka v zhizn'*, where he played the charismatic Tatar tramp Mustafa, transformed from a tramp into an exemplary Soviet youth – made him famous at home and abroad, as the film was sold to 26 countries after receiving the audience prize at the first Venice Film Festival in 1932.

The storyline of *Song of Happiness* freely combined elements of Eshpai's, Kyrliia's and Mustafa's stories and Kyrliia himself prepared to play the main character in the film. In the end he did not take part in the shooting due to his protracted involvement with Ivanov-Barkov's *Buddha's Deputy/Namestnik Buddy* (1935).<sup>23</sup> The leading role went to the novice actor Mikhail Viktorov. His partners in the film included experienced actors Vladimir Gardin, Ianina Zheimo, Boris Tenin and Fedor Nikitin. The cast combined leading actors in the main roles with amateur *typage* in the episodes; foregrounding professional actors, the film won praise as a successful transition to the actors' cinema (Deriabin 2001: 171–88). Replacing Asian-featured Kyrliia with European-looking Viktorov<sup>24</sup> the directors opted for a type which did not evoke an immediate visual 'othering'. Viktorov was expected to act out the transformation of an uneducated village boy into a conservatoire graduate and demonstrate the young Mari's smooth and seamless assimilation into Soviet high culture. Assimilation along with preservation of recognizable national features became the declared objective of Soviet cultural policy, and *Song of Happiness* sought to demonstrate it simultaneously on visual, narrative and musical levels using the Mari as an illustration of Soviet national and cultural policy of the day.<sup>25</sup>

## COLLECTIVE AUTHORSHIP AND NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS

Institutional pressure on the scriptwriters, especially for expensive sound productions, increased dramatically in the 1930s. Each script – from the moment it was conceived as a short libretto and further throughout the various production stages, was supervised by the studio and external censorship units. At the same time, all the calls for 'iron scripts' notwithstanding, in many cases the script continued to change during the production stage and in its final version represented the product of a truly collective authorship, as exemplified by the case of 'Floating Waters'. The final film version starts off in 1924 with a young Mari named Kavyrliia (Mikhail Viktorov) hiding away in the woods. There he accidentally meets a petty crook, Gorokh (Boris Tenin), to whom he tells his story. In a lengthy flashback, we learn of his life on the Volga river where he had rafted timber. Kavyrliia is in love with a village girl, Anuk (Ianina Zheimo), who is also courted by his elderly boss (Nikolai Michurin) with whom Kavyrliia gets into a fight. As the old man falls into the river, Kavyrliia escapes what he

20. Production of the film 'Flowing Waters' started on 1 July 1933 (RGALI 2489/1/80: 22). At the meeting of Vostokfil'm's Party and Komsomol organizations on 15 October 1933, Party Secretary Gaisin reported that 35 per cent of the shooting was complete yet the script was not finalized and the directors had conflicting understandings of how it should be further developed (RGALI 2489/1/84: 30).
21. For a concise biography of Jyvan Kyrliia see <http://kino-teatr.ru/kino/acter/sov/33937/bio/> (accessed 10 March 2010).
22. The *rabfak* or *rabochii fakul'tet* (workers' department) existed from 1919 into the 1930s with the aim of preparing young people to receive higher education. The departments were created to compensate for the lack of education for the workers and peasants who acquired the right to enter academic institutions of higher education without a secondary-school diploma on the basis of the SNK RSFSR decree of 2 August 1918. The *rabfaks* accepted workers and peasants over 16 years of age recommended by the workplace, trade unions, party or state organs. Those studying at *rabfaks* were considered to be employed full-time and received state scholarships.
23. The film was started by Vostokfil'm on 1 March 1934, shooting continued even after the closing down of the studio all the way into July 1935, but in autumn 1935 the almost-ready film was shelved (Fomin 2007: 267).

24. Prior to *Song of Happiness*, Viktorov acted in Vera Stroeveva's film *The Man without a Case* (1931) and had an episodic role of a journalist in *Wings* (co-directed by Il'ia Kravchunovskii, Mikhail Gornorov and Boris Iurtsev, 1932); he later played border guards and officers in *Girl from Kamchatka* (1936), *Border is Locked* (1937) and *First Cavalry* (1941).
25. On 4 November 1920, Sovnarkom and VTsIK passed the decision on the creation of the Autonomous Oblast of the Mari People within the RSFSR yet the decree did not include a concrete territorial definition of the oblast. On 25 November 1920 a decree specifying the borders of the oblast was passed. Finally, in February 1931 relevant acts on passing and accepting the territories by the Revolutionary Committee of the Mari AO were signed. On 1 March 1921, a mass feast celebrating the creation of the new republic was organized which was from then celebrated as the birthday of MAO until 1936, when MAO was reformed into the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1936, the republic's 'birthday' was declared to be 21 June, the opening date of the first Regional Soviet Congress in 1921. In 1960, the republic's 'birthday' was moved to 4 November.
26. OGPU, standing for the United State Political Administration, was a security police agency established in 1922 (as GPU). It was renamed NKVD in 1934.



Figure 4: *Song of Happiness*.

believes to be a murder. Upon hearing this story, Gorokh decides to make use of Kavyrlia's musical talent to pickpocket at the market fair. Caught at the scene of a crime and wrongly arrested for theft, Kavyrlia ends up in a labour colony, where his musical talents are noticed by the OGPU officer (Boris Chirkov) in charge of the inmates' re-education. He arranges for the young man to be sent to study in a conservatoire. Under the assumed name Misha Eshpai, he becomes a pupil of a distinguished German professor (Vladimir Gardin) who has taken refuge from Nazism in the Soviet Union. Graduating with distinction, Kavyrlia is afraid of his past, and refuses to return to his native land. When Anuk, who meanwhile also received education and became a representative of the Mari Education Department of Narkompros, finds him after seeing his photograph in a newspaper article on young Mari talents, he denies knowing her in the presence of his fellow classmates. Plagued by guilt, he eventually goes to confess his 'crime' to his OGPU patron, who admits having known Kavyrlia's 'real' identity and his past, and surprises him by telling that the murder never took place. His conscience relieved, Kavyrlia returns to his native Mari land to work and be reunited with Anuk.

The plotline thus features the linear development of the character from a naïve youth to a cultured member of socialist society, without applying a by then standard binary opposition of hero versus enemy. In fact, a real antagonist, so recurrent in the films of the period, is markedly absent from the film: even the petty crook so convincingly and charmingly played by Tenin appears to be more of a mischievous clown than a serious adversary. A somewhat underdeveloped figure of the enemy is Kavyrlia's elderly boss, shown as an old-time master temporarily accommodating himself to the new conditions. Not for long, indeed – as by the end of the film his file is already in the hands of the OGPU.<sup>26</sup>



Significant changes between different versions of the script and the film succinctly characterize the cultural context of the mid-1930s in the Soviet Union, increasingly focusing on the individual hero yet standardizing his biography according to a rigid scheme, instrumentalizing folklore and re-evaluating the cultural heritage, largely renounced by avant-garde iconoclasts during the previous decade. Going through various stages, the script lost all of its gags and comical episodes and relegated eccentric characteristics to the side characters. From a mixture of comedy and adventure it became a paradoxical *Bildungsfilm* where the hero's only independent deed is the act of repenting to the authorities. The first version of the script was submitted in late 1932 and was promptly revised after the first round of criticisms. The reworked script was presented in December 1932 at a meeting of the scriptwriting sector of the studio. In his introductory remarks, Kholmskii reported the removal and reworking of a number of episodes, including the replacement of Kavyrliia's meeting with the newspaper reporters, which originally led to his entry into the conservatoire, with the episode in the labour camp, demonstrating the role of the penitentiary institutions in shaping the destinies of their 'disciples' (RGALI 2489/1/56: 113–15). The original script featured Kavyrliia as an ambitious young man longing to study and move to the city 'where all the *shialtyshi* [Mari for reeds] are made of gold'. In the second version, the main character 'restarts' his life after his release from the labour colony. In the film, he is noticed by the officer who decides his future by arranging his enrolment in the conservatoire.

While preserving the linear development of the character, the series of changes introduced a radically different motivation behind his decision to choose music as a profession. In the second version of the script, Kavyrliia declares his will to study to his ex-fellow inmates at the moment of his liberation and receives a crude but touching collectively signed 'recommendation letter':

Comrade Narkompros, we, inmates deprived of liberty, all like one from the woodcutting and knitting shops of the labour colony, ask you to send our comrade, Mari Kavyrliia Sarlaev, to study music in the conservatoire or some other university. Because Kavyrliia plays *shialtysh* with a proletarian background wonderfully. We all, the group of confined activists fiercely declare, comrade Narkom, that we have entered on the path of honest labour and will allow no more mischief.

(RGALI 631/3/155: 30–31)

In the film, however, decision-making power is fully and firmly in the hands of an OGPU officer. Quite in line with the 'reforging' strategy of early Soviet culture, in the script as well as in the film, the labour colony inmates are not defined as hopeless criminals. The idea of re-education through labour, advocated, among others, by Maksim Gor'kii and showcased in the infamous construction of the Belomorkanal, left traces in Soviet cinema not only in propaganda agitation films (*Solovki* (1928), *White Sea Canal* (1935), *The Way is Open* (1937)), but in fiction feature films as well (Cherviakov's *Prisoners/Zakliuchennnye* was begun by Vostokfil'm in 1934).<sup>27</sup> While the episode of the 'recommendation letter' was not included to the film, the prisoners were portrayed in a sympathetic way and some are even shown as charismatic characters, like an inmate played by Leonid Kmit, who in the same year appeared as Pet'ka, the shrewd assistant of a Red Army commander in the celebrated *Chapaev* (Sergei and Georgii Vasil'ev, 1934). While the transformation of the

27. For more on Gor'kii and reforging see Papazian (2009). *Prisoners* was completed by Mosfil'm after the dissolution of Vostokfil'm in 1935.



*Figure 5: Song of Happiness.*

prison scene deprived the inmates of agency, they were shown maintaining internal solidarity. For the film, however, the still traceable, though reduced rhetoric of the ‘reforging’ of criminals through labour remains secondary to fear, which emerges as the main driving force for the narrative.

Along with Kavyrliia’s transformation from an ambitious ‘national’ to a dependent and subordinate individual, the role of his girlfriend also changes in the process of collective script editing, losing all the characteristics of an ardent national activist. Her passionate speech to Kavyrliia, still present in the second version of the script, in which she mixes Russian and Mari stating ‘we have our own art schools, we will have our own scholars, our engineers, our musicians, maybe better than you, but they have to be helped, they have to be taught [...] Its your motherland, your people, your nation, yours, yours, yours ... Or maybe you are no longer a Mari?’ (RGALI 631/3/155: 57) made a representative of Soiuzkino inquire ‘whether there is a certain nationalism’ in the main character’s return to the Mari Oblast (RGALI 631/3/155: 114). A representative of the Mari region, invited to the discussion of the script, carefully stated that while ‘the film should not follow an agitprop model’ it should ‘better demonstrate the class warfare [...] backwardness in the sphere of arts, primitive instruments [...] and at the same time show how the region developed in all directions, particularly how the musical culture grew’ (RGALI 2489/1/59: 114) – in other words, he outlined a typical agitprop film structure, which was routinely applied to the representations of minorities within the Russian Federation. Although both Kholmetskii and Donskoi denied any accusations of nationalism, the scene was not included to the film and, importantly, the use of the Mari language significantly changed. In the script it is used in the most emotionally charged scene, where Kavyrliia and Anuk discuss his future after graduation. In the film Kavyrliia, known to his colleagues by the assumed



Figures 6 and 7: *Song of Happiness*.

name of Misha Eshpai, denies knowing Anuk and the conversation does not take place. While the film keeps the linguistic polyphony characteristic of early Soviet sound films, the use of Mari is reduced to the deeply personal or fully staged occasions, expressing jealousy (as Kavyrlia learns about his boss's advances to Anuk) and giving a formal speech in the closing episode where, greeting the masses, Kavyrlia exemplifies the success of Soviet nationality policies.

Finally, three important changes on the way from script to film transformed the role that music was to play. First of all, the folk songs abundantly present in the script were not included in the film, leaving two melodic lines in the soundtrack – 'Vüdsö joga' and 'Erdenat volal'ym' characterizing the leading male and female characters in line with the crystallizing standard of classical Hollywood narrative cinema. The original script contained a number of Mari folk songs and satiric *chastushki* (sung limericks), 'a short rhyming verse form that reflected current popular topics, sung by individual singers'.<sup>28</sup> Mari folk songs were to be performed by Anuk, her grandmother and the village women, and limericks assigned to the male workers, inciting the struggle with the boss. Revolutionary *chastushki* were sung by the pick-pocket in the market scene; they remained in the film but their message was depoliticized, following the comment of one of the script evaluators that 'when Gorokh is singing about Marxism it's not appropriate'.<sup>29</sup>

The second kind of change affected episodes commenting on contemporary music – Soviet and 'western' – both of which were originally envisioned in an ironic key. In the script, the Party activist Volchek is trying to introduce 'proletarian music' by playing the pieces which he names 'Infiltration of Trade Capital in the 1880–90s' and 'Religion as Means of Manipulation and Exploitation in the Hands of the Capital' (RGALI 631/3/155: 51–52). His classmates, however, do not take him seriously and make fun of his zealous statements: 'Any fool can play Beethoven, but try to tell me about the primary accumulation of capital.' Similarly ironical, by introducing the grotesque figure of a female accompanist and an episode in a restaurant (both missing from the film), the script featured fashionable 'western foxtrot and jazz' tunes.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the nationality of the old professor who decides to teach Kavyrlia music is changed from Czech to German, a marked difference crediting Soviet musical education with a 'noble' genealogy and justifying its legacy of the world classical heritage.<sup>31</sup> Excluding all references to contemporary music, the film version identifies western musical tradition as 'canon' and 'history', marking a brief transitional moment between openness towards 'the West as the teacher' and growing hostility to musical developments outside the Soviet Union. All in all,

28. Olson (2004: 22). On the regime's distrust of *chastushki* and other 'urban musical folklore' see Nelson (2004: 103–05).
29. RGALI 2489/1/56: 114. The original version of the limerick went: I have never had a father/And my mother told me once/Don't be a thief/Do no mischief// We've finished with tsarism/And Niki is all gone/I went into Marxism/As suggested by mom. [U mine nema papashi/I skazala mine mat'/Ty gliadi ne bud' apashem/I ne vzdumai balovat'. //My pokonchili s tsarizmom/I nikolki nyne net/I uvleksia ia marksizmom / Pomnia mamen'kin sovet].
30. Along with the removal of the above-mentioned episodes, the script was also purged of other gags, some borrowed from other sources – like an episode in which Kavyrlia discovers his classmate Volchek living in a double-bass case, already used by Nikolai Erdman and Vladimir Mass in their play *Musical Shop* staged by the Leningrad Music Hall, and later used as a basis for Aleksandrov's musical comedy *Happy Guys* (1934). The episode is also missing from Aleksandrov's film.
31. The script features Professor Vitaček, of Czech origin, who was a well-known professor of the Conservatoire and the head of the violin restoration workshop.

32. On the idea of 'national mapping' through music, see Bohlman (2002).
33. On the eighteenth-century changes in the perception of 'Eastern' music see Gelbart (2007: 124).
34. Two diamond insignia on an officer's uniform, used in place of epaulettes in the 1920s–1930s, imply the XI category and mark him as the head or deputy head of the labour camp.
35. Compare, for example, the use of the radio by Kozintsev and Trauberg in their early sound film *Alone/Odna* (1931) and its analysis by Hänsen (2006).

on the way from script to film the narrative was adjusted in line with the agit-prop conventions and music was ascribed its nineteenth-century *Kulturträger* mission. This combination paradoxically allowed for the subordination and marginalization of folklore within the soundtrack while programmatically referring to folk music as 'an ideal foundation on which to develop people's musical sensibilities', typical of Soviet cultural policy (Nelson 2004: 30).

## WHICH INTERNATIONAL? ON MUSIC AND ITS NATIONAL PECULIARITIES

The opening panoramic shot of the Kokshaga river flowing into the Volga, accompanied by the extra-diegetic overlapping of a Russian *burlaks*' [barge haulers'] song 'Mother Volga' with a pentatonic tune, sets the programmatic message of the film from the very start. The nineteenth-century traditions of national landscape painting, combined with the legacy of orientalism, inscribe the character into an established framework of the primitive ethnic Other who is 'civilized' through his interaction with a 'higher-level' music and is expected to merge with the stronger cultural 'flow'.<sup>32</sup> In the following scene, Kavyrlia close-ups are intercut with close-ups of forest birds and animals as this 'savage son of nature' carves a reed and this time diegetically plays a pentatonic tune, a conventional musical shortcut for both the Orient and primal nature.<sup>33</sup>

In the first half of the film, Kavyrlia belongs to the world of nature rather than that of culture. Viktorov's character is driven by instincts of anger, fear and hunger and is virtually speechless. Music both connects him to 'innocent' nature and foregrounds his development into a 'fully fledged' human. Studying music implies learning a set of rules; throughout the film Kavyrlia learns to play by the rules and is controlled by others – first by a crook, then by the labour colony, finally by the conservatoire where he excels and is among the best students. His utterly malleable personality appears to be shaped by external circumstances and tamed by the use of primal drives of terror and reward.

The space of nature, dominating the first half of the film, is contrasted to the space of 'culture' which the protagonist enters in the second half. Music serves as both a connecting and a separating element between the two worlds, easing the transition and ensuring the underlying unity of the character's personality. The labour colony plays the 'transitional' role of a purgatory that ultimately sets Kavyrlia on the 'right path'. It is there, with the help of the OGPU officer, that he first hears the radio, whose tune he instantly tries to imitate with his reed.<sup>34</sup> In this episode, music fuses with and takes over the anonymous logocentric power that radio conventionally represents in Soviet cinema.<sup>35</sup> Music is viewed in the film as a marker of both the inherent morality of the character and his promising plasticity; while all the inmates are captivated by the tune, their attitude to music sifts the wheat from the chaff. Contrary to the established use of radio as a medium of the official word, here it presents the regime as the bearer of high culture (Margolit 2007: 261–63). Praising the character's natural talent, the officer, who declares himself to be a music lover, takes him to the conservatoire, securing the 'developmental' path of the young Mari national. In the space of 'high culture' all visual props are symbolically anchored in multi-layered European cultural vocabulary. Coming to the conservatoire, Kavyrlia enters a highly hierarchical world, where a grand staircase conventionally marks the path to upward mobility, and long corridors with closed doors exemplify a variety of paths to 'culture'. The door through which the officer wants to take his protégée leads to the conservatoire's local

party cell. The protagonist, however, tries another door and ends up in a faculty meeting attended by the highbrow 'old-school' musical elite.

Before entering the room, Kavyrliia walks along a corridor where, opposite a bust of Tchaikovsky, he stops to look at a classical sculpture which, while remaining a curiosity for him, works as an important cultural marker. It is a statue of Pan teaching the shepherd Daphnis to play the panpipes.<sup>36</sup> The Greek provenance of the sculpture facilitates the connection of 'otherness' to classical antiquity and re-codes the 'exotic' as the 'folk' thus inscribing a post-Enlightenment legacy to the Soviet nationality project. In the Romantic tradition, it visualizes the intervention of Dionysian music to the Apollonian temple. Defeated by Apollo at a music competition in a well-known Greek myth, Pan makes his return here to 'advocate' the primal, collective and natural. Two important Romantic ideas extend the significance of the visual prop: first of all, the argument that the 'lower stratum within a "civilized" society [...] might stand as *the* "national" culture' and second, the idea according to which 'once the human mind is conceived of as a lamp rather than a mimetic mirror [...] any mind may connect directly to natural (as human primal) impulses and partake in this mysterious creative ability' (Gelbart 2007: 91, 92; emphasis in the original).

The sculpture shows Pan with his *eromenos*, an adolescent boy undergoing pedagogical training and simultaneously the object of affection and passion. Pan teaching Daphnis codes the teacher-apprentice relationship that Kavyrliia enters with all three of his male companions throughout the film – a crook, a police officer and a music teacher. The master-apprentice relationship is ironically commented on through the goat-legged Arcadian god of shepherds and flocks as well as of rustic music. Renowned for his sexual prowess, this 'billy goat in human form [...] was always falling upon his victims with his phallus at the ready' (Sissa and Detienne 2000: 232), exemplifying vitality and authority over the young and powerless. Kavyrliia's apprenticeship thus fits well with Lilya Kaganovsky's reading of 1930s Soviet culture being dominated by the 'male flight from the norms and conventions of the patriarchal family back toward the promise of masculine utopia' (Kaganovsky 2008: 4). The heterosexual relationship of the hero remains a frame within which Kavyrliia's coming of age occurs first and foremost through homosocial bonds. In line with numerous films and novels about heroic pilots, tractor drivers and construction workers (see Clark 2000), *Song of Happiness* has a somewhat underdeveloped love plot. The choice of Ianina Zheimo, a famous Soviet transvestite actress, as the female lead further marks the budding relationship of the two main characters as childlike. Leaving his girlfriend to wail over a small, broken reed pipe, Kavyrliia matures as he becomes a professional flautist, his masculinity measured by the size of the instrument and the professionalism of his performance, as well as by mastering the 'classical' canon. The parallel maturation of his girlfriend into a proper Soviet functionary justifies their reunion in the final episode of the film.

The episode which brings together the representations of music, gender and otherness inscribed within the Soviet-designed framework of orientalism is Kavyrliia's first meeting with the conservatoire faculty, which takes place while Kavyrliia's 'guide' is arranging for him to be admitted to the conservatoire through the local party cell. In this sequence, Kavyrliia timidly enters the room and is subjected to the austere stare of the professors, joined by the gloomy gazes of Beethoven and Wagner from the wall where they are positioned as key musical authorities. He proffers a request letter from the colony and is then

36. A marble version of a second-century AD Roman copy of a Greek original from c. 100 BC, attributed to Heliodorus, found in Pompeii.



37. Among these productions were *Rienzi* by Vsevolod Meyerhold, performed at the Conservatoire on 8 July 1921 and Nikolai Petrov's production at the former Mariinskii Theatre in Petrograd, and *Die Meistersinger* for the celebration of Revolution's ninth anniversary in 1926. See Carnegy (2006: chapters 7 and 10). For further details see also Bartlett (1995: 221–70).
38. For a short while Wagner would return to the Soviet stage with Eisenstein's production of *Die Walküre* in 1940, following the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. See Eisenstein (1998: 161 and 1968: 329–59).
39. Characteristically, during the years of 'cultural revolution' all portraits of the famous composers of the past except those of Beethoven and Mussorgsky were removed from the Moscow Conservatoire recital hall. See Nelson (2004: 209).

condescendingly asked to show his skills. His performance is preceded by the mechanical tune of a rococo clock, contrasting 'artificial' and 'natural' music, and tacitly pointing to how 'the dependency on mechanical time takes the place of the temporal categories of previous or alternative modes of cultural organization' (Makdisi 1998: 180). Playing the pentatonic Mari song 'Erdenat volal'ym', Kavyrliia earns a rather disheartening response from the faculty, but meanwhile Wagner smiles at the native talent from his portrait. Against an overall rejection, a German professor, played by Gardin as a (perhaps unwitting) parody of Caligari, takes an interest in the young fellow, inquires about the instrument and promises to teach him to play 'a big, real pipe'.

The choice of Beethoven and Wagner as musical authorities uses the established trope of Germans as 'people of music' (Applegate and Potter 2002). In the context of the early Soviet debates on musical heritage, which sought to re-evaluate the role of the 'classics' in the proletarian state by challenging the overall legacy of western musical tradition (Taruskin 1997: 512), Beethoven and Wagner were accepted and promoted as flag officers of the Revolution. The centenary of Beethoven's death was widely and officially celebrated in March 1927 with the intention of identifying 'the composer with the Soviet revolutionary agenda' (Nelson 2004: 187). While the outpouring of concerts, lectures and publications added up to a solid image of Beethoven as a Revolutionary forerunner, which persisted throughout the Soviet years, attitudes towards Wagner experienced a significant transformation in the first Soviet decade. In the immediate post-Revolutionary years, the works of Wagner were viewed as 'an anti-bourgeois art that would inculcate social values in the populace' and attracted extensive attention in musical and theatrical life. Appearing as early as in 1918, a translation of Wagner's *Art and Revolution* was one of the first publications by Anatolii Lunacharskii's Commissariat of Public Enlightenment (Carnegy 2006: 311). Soviet theatrical productions reworked Wagner's works into heavily ideologically readjusted proto-Bolshevik statements.<sup>37</sup> But already in the late 1920s and early 1930s Wagner was 'denounced as an imperialist, as an artist incomprehensible to the masses, and his works vanished from the boards' (Carnegy 2006: 312). In 1933, the Mariinskii/Kirov Theatre's production of *Das Rheingold*, prepared to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Wagner's death, was cancelled after Hitler came to power in Germany (Carnegy 2006: 226). In Aleksandrov's musical comedy *Volga-Volga* (1938) Wagner and his aficionado tuba amateur are used as a proxy for unintelligible art remote from 'the people'.<sup>38</sup> Wagner's appearance as a 'supreme judge' smiling at a young Mari autodidact in *Song of Happiness* in 1934 (and representing the mid-1920s) was thus merging the authority he held for the early Soviet internationalist avant-gardists with the propagation of the 'national music' which achieved growing prominence in the 1930s in the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> Wagner's specific interest in 'Germanness' was predictably forsaken and he appeared as an admirer of folk music and propagator of national peculiarity per se.

The episode is structured as a contrast between two opposite takes on music. One, attributed to the majority of 'old-school' teachers, separates 'art' and 'folk' and excludes the latter from the space of 'high culture' (hence an old professor comments on Kavyrliia's performance: 'Very pretty, but this is not music yet; we don't even have such instruments in our programme.') The other approach is rooted in a Romantic concept of the *Volkslied* as introduced by Herder. In German Romantic discourse, 'art-musical masterpieces [...] were supposedly universal and timeless precisely because they synthesized

and absorbed the folk collective into the mind of the individual composing genius' (Gelbart 2007: 11). The emergence of a Romantic attitude towards folk music was intertwined with a profound transformation in perceiving and representing nature, changing in the nineteenth century 'from ubiquitous moral guide (the form it takes in pastoral) to historicized emblem of lost innocence – nature as Other' (Gelbart 2007: 79).

The return of a Romantic paradigm that Vostokfil'm was fighting came to replace single attempts to offer conceptual alternatives to the existing 'symbolic geography' and subvert the asymmetric relationship of civilized and exotic, developed and backward, emerging in the 1920s in different fields of culture. In cinema, Dziga Vertov's film-poem *One Sixth of the World/Shestaia chast'mira* (1926) constructed a new decentralized spatial configuration (Sarkisova 2007; Widdis 2003). In music, one of those who radically challenged the traditional perceptions of 'West' and 'East' was Arsenii Avraamov – musician and theoretician of music, Proletkult activist and inventor of the 'universal tone system'.<sup>40</sup> Along with his interest in folklore, he conducted pioneering work in film sound and together with three other composers took part in creating the soundtrack for Abram Room's experimental montage film *The Plan for Great Works/Plan velikikh rabot* (1930), for which Legoshin was a script consultant.

In his 1924 article 'The Problem of the East in Musical Science' (Avraamov 1924: 216–27), published in *Russkii sovremennik*, Avraamov argued against the universal domination of the western European musical canon, claiming that the system of equal temperament does not do justice to the complex melodies found in the East. He thus outlined the need for the 'new perfected methods of fixation and reproduction of the living musical speech [...] which

40. Avraamov also designed new musical instruments, and organized various avant-garde performances, best known of which is 'Symphony of Sirens', which used naval sirens, whistles, car horns, machine guns and cannon fire. 'Avraamov is talking about equal-tempered instruments which, when tuned slightly lower or higher than normal can, in combination, produce a scale of 36 or 48 tones that would provide fairly close approximations of intervals found in the harmonic series. Avraamov ensured that his ideas went further than the theoretical stage, and organized concert performances with various ensembles during the 1920s. But like all other ambitious and innovative projects of this period, Avraamov's work foundered once Stalin had consolidated his power' (Frolova-Walker 2007: 244). For more about Avraamov's 'Symphony of Sirens', sometimes translated also as 'Symphony of Factory Whistles' see Nelson (2004: 27–28) and Rumiantsev (2007: 66–84).



Figure 8: *Song of Happiness*.

41 *Song of Happiness* features a paradigmatic reversal of the pair Tenin–Gardin as compared to Iutkevich's *Counterplan*. There an old master Gardin was 're-educated' by a young charismatic Party secretary Tenin. In *Song of Happiness*, Gardin is an established old professor, a master of unquestionable status, Viktorov is his diligent student while Tenin is a marginal crook. With the re-establishment of the generational hierarchy and re-evaluation of 'cultural capital', the film demonstrates a repositioning of the eccentric gesture, here relegated to the margins and ascribed to the deviant and ultimately imprisoned characters played by Tenin and Kmit.

cannot be recorded with the help of the sharp-flat system' (Avraamov 1924: 218). Formulating his musical programme in the political language of the day, Avraamov pleaded for a new revolution, identifying well temperament as the main enemy of the 'musical East': 'Failure of the world October Revolution surrenders the musical East to the invasion and robbery of the "international template" of the piano: "wohl"-temperament, bearing the fatal stamp "Made in Germany"' (Avraamov 1924: 222). In the passionate language of political slogans, branding the 'international of piano music' reactionary and counter-revolutionary, Avraamov proposed to implement a 'strictly scientific approach to the songs of the East, a precise analysis of their tonal structures and as a logical conclusion – the development of a corresponding notation system' (Avraamov 1924: 227).

While Avraamov himself had conducted extensive ethno-musicological studies in the northern Caucasus, his conceptualization of 'East' versus 'West' reflected the existing binary opposition, albeit with changed polarities. In the early Soviet years different visions of new proletarian culture existed in competition, and for a short while among them were also positions marginal to the mainstream musical discourse. Belonging to the same generation and sharing Avraamov's political zeal, Lobachev was far from being a revolutionary in music. His musical score in *Song of Happiness* combines the diegetic performance of harmonized folk tunes, the use of leitmotifs and an extra-diegetic symphonic score that 'follow[s] visual incidents and illustrate[s] them either by directly imitating them or by using clichés that are associated with the mood and content of the picture' (Adorno and Eisler 2007 [1947]: 7). Despite Lobachev's credentials as a prolific revolutionary songwriter, the film does not contain any newly composed songs. Contrary to the *Schlager*-filled musical *Happy Guys* by Aleksandrov (which went into distribution the same year and won instant popularity), *Song of Happiness*, while referring to Jyvan Kyrliā's poem 'Singing from Happiness', lacked the memorable song that it claimed in its title.

Gradually marginalizing radical experiments that challenged existing cultural hierarchies, the debate on the importance of cultural heritage returned in the 1930s; and *Song of Happiness* manifestly demonstrates the resurgence of the musical canon.<sup>41</sup> It is J.S. Bach, identified by Avraamov in the 1920s as the main 'culprit' of the 'enslavement of the ear', who is performed for the labour colony inmates at the concert given by Professor Vitaček's graduates. In a later episode, the young graduates of different national origins discuss their future plans while packing as they prepare to return to their native lands. Thinking of his future, a Georgian pianist pathetically exclaims: 'Kazbek peak is in the clouds. And shepherds are listening to Bach!' – verbalizing the *Kulturträger* programme while himself representing a type of new Soviet intelligentsia 'whose political loyalty, social origins, and practical skills were beyond reproach' (Nelson 2004: 208). Only by confessing his 'sins' to the state security police does Kavyrliā regain his name along with the right to 'sing his song' happily.

The pairing of Beethoven and Wagner thus not only drew on the 'universalist' ideal type of German music, but demonstrated its outward appropriation by Soviet culture. The two portraits in the faculty room exemplify both the continuation of the Romantic paradigm and a bifurcation point within Soviet nationality and cultural politics. Appearing as a safe and sound haven for the German professor, the Soviet Union is constructed in *Song of Happiness* as a legitimate heir to the German – and by proxy the

whole western – cultural legacy, ‘raising’ folk tunes and their performers to the realm of high culture. While the appearance in the meeting room of a young communist student imitating (somewhat parodically) Beethoven’s features and hair style hinted that a young generation of Soviet ‘Beethovens’ is coming of age, the ‘revolutionizing’ project no longer refers to a revolution in music. The students are taught a western canon prioritizing the Romantic tradition. Entering the world of culture starts with practising scales for Kavyrlia and with learning the Cyrillic alphabet for Anuk, the two shown in parallel editing. The western tonal system and Russian orthography allow the national minorities to enter the world of high culture. The vision of ‘a shepherd boy, making a reed without any knowledge of acoustic laws’ (Avraamov 1924: 226) as the true creator of music is replaced by a musician as a master of cultural heritage.

The closing episode of the film shows a bespectacled Kavyrlia in a modern suit on the stage, surrounded by banners praising Lenin’s nationality politics. He addresses a large audience which includes his old-time co-workers, also clad in suits and ties. Speaking in Mari, proudly clutching his flute, he introduces himself as Kavyrlia and receives a heartfelt welcome. Leaving the stage, he walks by the river with Anuk, also dressed in a suit and a stylish beret, seemingly harmonizing the private and the public. Three years earlier, in 1931, Ekk’s *Road to Life* ended with Mustafa’s death just before his dreams of becoming an engine driver were fulfilled. Catching up with modernity went astray: he was murdered by an urban gang of his ex-friends on the way back to the colony while singing a Mari folk song ‘Oi lui modesh’ (in Russian: ‘Oi, kunitsa igraet’) in a blissful moment of complete harmony with nature, the past, the present and the future. Inadvertently, this culmination laid bare the utopian dimension of the Soviet indigenization project.

The emphasis on the importance of the world classical heritage as the main cultural guideline remained peculiar to the short period of the early to mid-1930s and was soon replaced by the intensive and extensive promotion of folklore and amateur artistic movements. The year 1934 marked a turning point in official policy towards folklore (Olson 2004: 38), and *Pravda*’s editorial ‘Chaos instead of Music’ on 28 January 1936, condemning Shostakovich’s opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, established the guidelines for Soviet musical policy for the next two decades. National folklore was constructed as a crucial pillar of mass culture, and ‘intelligibility’ became the main criterion of evaluation.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, a campaign against ‘bourgeois nationalists’ in the central and local press preceded and legitimized mass arrests among national elites in the Soviet autonomous republics. The ‘exposure’ of national ‘deviations’ led to mass executions among the leaders of national communities previously hailed as exemplary communists.<sup>43</sup> By the mid-1930s, the policy of centrally planned national representations, combined with the rising wave of terror, promoted a rigid and inflexible portrayal of national entities in the Soviet Union.

In *Song of Happiness*, Kavyrlia’s return to the Mari people as a mediator between folk and high musical culture visually embodies the slogan ‘national in form, socialist in content’. The legacy of Romanticism here is married to a nascent socialist realist aesthetic with its inherent logic of linear progression, which domesticates, assimilates and ultimately overcomes cultural otherness. The need for the new songs of assimilated otherness was pressing indeed. Speaking at the first Congress of Soviet Writers, Maksim Gor’kii appealed to his fellow writers to create new songs – ‘the ones that the world does not

42. ‘Tvorcheskaia diskussia v Leningradskom Soiuz Sovetskikh Kompozitorov. 21–26 fevralia 1936g. Stenograficheskii otchet’, in Rakhmanova (2006: 314–540).

43. In 1934, the leading Soviet film magazine published an article condemning a number of films produced by the Ukrainian film studio VUFKU for ‘nationalist deviations’ (Korniichuk and Iurchenko 1934). The political campaign against communist elites among national minorities pinnacle in a series of articles in *Pravda* in 1937 (Sanukov 2000).

44. Petr Riazanov, at the February discussion of the Leningrad Union of Soviet Composers, cited in Rakhmanova (2006: 328).

have, but which it should have' (Anon 1990: 679). Developing this idea, he argued for the right to alter traditions and *create* new folklore:

One has to notice that an old tune, even in a somewhat modified version, filled with new words, creates a song, which would be endorsed quite easily. One need only understand the meaning of rhythm: the start of *Dubinushka* [The Little Oak Stick] can be stretched to a minute, but can also be sung to a dancing rhythm. Young poets should not despise the creation of popular songs.

(Anon 1990: 680)

The creators of 1930s Soviet culture gradually learned to do just that – pick up the rhythm of the day and fine tune it to changing cultural and nationality politics. Not everyone lived in the same rhythm, however. In 1937, the actor Jyvan Kyrilia was arrested and accused of 'bourgeois nationalism' and anti-Russian conspiracy; he later died in a labour camp. The national minorities on Soviet screens went on singing the praises of Soviet nationality policy as the path to success through cultural assimilation which, nonetheless, preserved a rigid set of recognizable folkloric markers. Predating the 'big brother' rhetoric, *Song of Happiness* reinstated the binary logic of Orient versus Occident but demonstrated the multi-level entanglement of these symbolic loci. However cheerfully 'songs of happiness' sounded from the screen, the ambitious Soviet cultural programme to overtake the cultural legacy and civilizational discourse of the 'West' by emancipating the nations of the 'East', educating new national elites and 'upgrading' folk music to the realm of art, proved short-lived. In the emerging cultural paradigm 'the border between mass amateur art and what we used to call "high art" had to be erased'.<sup>44</sup>

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