

researched and well-written. Although it can be challenging to jump from one case study to another, there is a consistency of line which successfully links the constituent parts of this volume making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. This is a quality tome on glossy paper with very few misprints (catastrophy, 66) or errors of fact. Occasionally the translations could be queried, as for instance, ‘professional honesty’ for ‘professional honour’ (22), ‘of the Soviet countries’ for ‘of the land of the Soviets’ (202), and there was the very occasional misprint in the Russian, *найгорчайше* for *наигорчайше* (200).

There is however at the heart of this book a contradiction in its presentation which needs to be noted. The articles in English provide an English translation of all the quotations of Russian sources, an invaluable feature in a work treating a very fluid linguistic situation in which meanings are in the process of being negotiated and refashioned. However the articles in Russian, one of which deals with the response of poetry, understandably do not provide such a feature. This effectively divides the book into two sections: the part directed at an English-speaking audience and that written with a Russian-speaking audience in mind. While not irreconcilable, this division does reflect a bifurcation of competences on the part of the contributors and an expected division among those who will access it.

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Simo Mikkonen, *Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s: A History of Composers' Bureaucracy* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellers, 2009).

Two of the most fundamental organisational events in the history of Russian music occurred precisely seventy years apart: the foundation of the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1862 and the 1932 Resolution ‘On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organisations’. The decade that followed in the wake of each event witnessed significant and profound changes in the musical life of the nation, particularly in regard to the professional status of Russian/Soviet musicians. Both the 1860s and 1930s offer rich case studies – in a field of music history rather too dominated by accounts of the ‘big’ names and events – of the minutiae of daily professional life, personal relationships and rivalries amongst both well and lesser

known figures, organisational change, and competing attitudes and ideologies. In this final sense, both decades were marked by intensely fought wars of ideas.

For thirty years, readers in English have been spoilt by Robert C. Ridenour's excellent account of the polemical debates of the 1860s between Anton Rubinstein, and his supporters in the Russian Musical Society, and the Nationalist camp formed around Vladimir Stasov and the members of the *moguchaiia kuchka*. Simo Mikkonen's new book, in a great many respects, provides a similar service in regard to the first Stalinist decade. While Mikkonen is under no debt to Ridenour, his work must, and does, repeatedly, refer to unsurpassable work of Boris Schwarz, whose substantial and splendid account of music in the Soviet Union up to the Brezhnev era, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, remains the authoritative English-language text. However, as Mikkonen correctly points out, the conditions under which Schwarz performed his basic research were considerably restricted, and recent opening up has provided the justification for further work in the area. If Mikkonen's 'ground-level' approach is, although focussed on a single decade, in many ways similar to Schwarz's, the conclusions he reaches about that decade are rather different. Schwarz characterised the 1930s in music as one of 'regimentation', basing his arguments not just on the infamous *Pravda* editorial of January 1936 directed against Shostakovich, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki*, but on the widespread organisational changes that followed the 1932 Resolution, the establishment of socialist realism as Party doctrine and the attempts to contain the splintering effects of the 1920s rivalry between 'leftist' proletarianism and bourgeois modernism through the formation of the Union of Composers. Mikkonen, by contrast, notes that the understanding of the 1930s as a decade of increasingly centralised control in Soviet musical life has been coloured by assumptions based on the much more extensive scholarly discussion of the development of 1930s Soviet policy in regard to literature. He finds no clear documentation, for example, to show that the Composers' Union as constituted in the 1930s shared anything like the degree of central organisation that is to be detected in the Writers' Union. Indeed, he claims that it was not until 1948, during the *Zhdanovshchina*, that the Composers' Union enjoyed, so to speak, the centrifugal force of an *orgkomitet*, something the Writers' Union had had in place virtually since its inception. Comparatively few Party members constituted its ranks, and there appears to have been a noticeable lack of full-time Party apparatchiks involved in its day-to-day business. He also makes note of the much

smaller number of musical figures to have perished in the Terror in comparison to that of their literary comrades – the one notable exception being the chairman of the Moscow division of the Union, Nikolai Cheliapov. Such facts, and many other details, lead him to the not unreasonable conclusion that the Party was much less interested in developments in the musical sphere than it was in those of other branches of the arts.

Mikkonen argues that the Composers' Union was, in fact, a relatively splintered and disorganised body, divided geographically and politically, in which policy was determined as much by the inclinations of individuals as by a centralist agenda. Of significant interest is the emergence of evidence pointing to the equal, if not surpassing, degree to which basic matters of material security served as policy motivation in contrast to ideological imperatives. The Union's leadership was noticeably keen to acquire benefits and privileges for its members, as well as to establish, not always successfully, a degree of hegemony over related activities such as recording, concert organisation and music publishing. It is also clear that the establishment of the Union represented, at least temporarily, something of a safe haven of aesthetic conservatism for a number of composers and performing musicians after the shrill proletarianism of the 1920s, and that the Stalinist-era nostalgia for the achievements of Chaikovsky and the *kuchka* probably ensured that the predominantly like-minded individuals who came to dominate the Union escaped significant scrutiny on a regular basis, notwithstanding one or two spectacular interventions in the late 1930s.

The basic research that underlies the portrait Mikkonen paints is meticulous and extensive. In addition to providing a richer context for the better known events of this period in music, he includes information on such things as the recording and publishing industries, the status of popular music – countering a long maintained belief that the 1930s were intolerant of 'light genres' – and the organisation of both major and minor performing groups and venues. In short, the author mines a rich and varied vein of data and leaves an impressive collection of ground-level observations to flesh out the overall thrust of his findings. In this lies the book's most obvious strength.

For all its scholarly merits, however, there is one significantly disappointing aspect to the book, and this relates to the quality of its expression and its editorial standards. The book is obviously the result of the author's doctoral research; while it is not made explicit how closely it resembles the original thesis, the

evidence suggests the parallel is rather extensive. The tendentious repetition of certain ideas seems to be evidence of this relationship. The expression is competent but hardly engaging; it is not infrequently unidiomatic, often in a way that is obtrusive and disruptive to the reader's train of thought; the number of typographical and other editorial errors is unacceptably high. This is a great shame, because it renders the reader's task much more arduous and frustrating than it should otherwise be, given the intrinsic interest and, indeed, drama of the subject matter. Despite this, the book remains a valuable corrective to simplistic glosses on the troubled decade in Soviet music that was the 1930s.

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Emily Lygo, *Leningrad Poetry 1953–1975: the Thaw Generation*, Russian Transformations: Literature, Thought, Culture, vol. 2 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), vii + 362 pp. ISBN 978-3-03911-370-5. SFR 69.00

The renaissance that occurred in Russian poetry in the thaw years after the death of Stalin has sometimes been referred to as a 'bronze' age following the Pushkinian 'golden' age and the 'silver' age of the period 1890–1920. Although by the mid-twentieth century the centre of artistic as well as political authority had moved from St Petersburg to Moscow, the former capital still maintained a powerful and distinctive poetic voice and was able to produce arguably the most distinguished of Russian Soviet period poets, the Nobel Prize winner Iosif Brodskii. While Brodskii himself has received significant critical attention, very little work has been done either to examine the verse of other Leningrad poets, or to place their work in its proper literary-historical context. Emily Lygo has produced the first book-length study of this period and has addressed both of these questions. In doing so she has brought the experience of the thaw generation poets into the broader history of twentieth-century Russian literature, shown the opportunities and obstacles presented by the specific set of literary-political conditions which prevailed, and also given clear, compelling and incisive accounts of the work of several individual poets. This is a considerable achievement, which will allow for a much more finely nuanced reading of Soviet-period poetry into the future.