

Soviet Forays into the Land of Music: VOKS Delegation's Visit to Austria in 1950 as an Encounter with Western Music and Musicians

Paper given at the *Soviet Encounters With West and East* conference, NRU HSE Moscow, 27-28

November 2018

Alexander Golovlev, Postdoctoral Fellow, International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow

The final stages of World War II, the liberation and occupation of vast swathes of Europe brought millions of Soviet citizens in direct contact with Eastern and Central European countries, including Germany and Austria, which came closest to the idea of the “west” in Soviet eyes. This forced contact created a series of problems both for Soviet GIs (many of whom met *Ostarbeiter* and inmates of concentration camps, who had been coerced into a direct and traumatic experience of Central Europe), and for local populations. However, as the Soviet Union spurned its effort to conquer hearts and minds, not least with the soft weapon of culture, a significant number of Soviet artists who had been called to the colours found themselves giving performances in Prague, Budapest, Berlin or Vienna. Despite careful planning and supervision in Moscow and on the ground, they invariably gathered own impressions of foreign countries. As public personae exposed to local audiences, such as during concerts, and at times communicating with local peers, they took part in a much more complex network of cultural transfers and appropriations that would be suggested by a top-down propaganda perspective. Recent scholarly literature has shown a remarkable interest in various forms of east-west cultural exchange,¹ particularly in the context of the Cold War. It is against this perspective that I would argue that taking into account smaller and less typical cases than the US, UK, France or even Germany itself,² would have an added value for scholarly understanding of east-west contacts, confrontations and co-habitations.

Austria is a valuable case since it was both part of the Soviet hard power sphere, given the Red Army military presence following the conquest of Vienna in April 1945, and of the emerging

¹ See, for instance: David Caute, *The Dancer Defects. The Struggle for Political Supremacy during the Cold War* (NY; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005). Simo Mikkonen and Peter Suutari, eds., *Music, Art and Diplomacy: East-West Cultural Relations and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2016).

² On a European perspective: Mark Carroll, *Music and Ideology in Cold War Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003). Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, “Culture and the Cold War in Europe,” in: Melvyn P. Leffler, Odd A. Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Vol. I: Origins*. (New York et al.: Cambridge UP, 2010), 398-419. Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried. *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015). Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, eds., *Beyond the Divide. Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

western, Atlantic world, as the three other Allies had their own zones³ and sectors in Vienna, the borders between those never becoming impermeable as in Germany. During the ten-year Allied occupation (stretching from 1945 to 1955, when Austria regained its full independence as a neutral country with a democratic parliamentary system), the Alpine Republic and its people became exposed to a variety and density of cultural imports that had hardly had a precedent.⁴ Artists accompanied the advancing Soviet troops, and the Soviet Union was the first major power to launch prestige offensives through culture, particularly exemplified by music the organised export of which both had a tradition of state patronage within the Soviet Union and proved to be popular with the Austrians. Although Austria was rather a regional, and at any rate not perceived as crucially “important”, case of a larger-scale Soviet strategy of prestige offensives,⁵ its strategic location and local political circumstances fed back into the practices of Soviet musical diplomacy. The ability to successfully compete with other Allies and socio-economic models therefore was crucially important. Launching a vigorous “sound diplomacy”,⁶ judging from its increasingly positive outcomes, became a significant part of Soviet policies in Austria.

From August 1945, when first performances of Soviet artists were given (including David Oistrakh and Galina Ulanova), through May 1955 when the Soviet Element opted for a festive (and musical) pull-out from Austria, the “musical Russia” was a continuous presence on Austrian scenes. As a subject more fully developed in my dissertation defended in September 2017,⁷ Soviet musical diplomacy *in toto* will not be extensively tackled in this presentation.

³ USSR: Lower Austria, the Burgenland, the Mühlviertel in Upper Austria; US: Salzburg, the rest of Upper Austria, the Ausseerland in the far north-western part of Styria; UK: remaining Styria, Carinthia, East Tirol; France: West Tirol, Vorarlberg; each power had a sector in Vienna, where the first, central district was governed by a joint inter-Allied administration. Unlike Germany, the inter-zonal borders in Austria never became impermeable, despite varying degrees of control and, occasionally, separate Allied currencies with restricted use.

⁴ Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation und Kalter Krieg : die Kulturmission der USA in Österreich nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991). Thomas Angerer and Jacques Le Rider, eds., *Ein Frühling dem kein Sommer folgte? Französisch-österreichische Kulturtransfers seit 1945*. (Vienna et al: Böhlau, 1999). Barbara Porpaczy, *Frankreich - Österreich 1945 - 1960 : Kulturpolitik und Identität* (Innsbruck; Vienna: Studienverlag, 2002). Earlier relevant research on the USSR includes: Wolfgang Mueller, *Österreichische Zeitung und die Russische Stunde : die Informationspolitik der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht in Österreich 1945 – 1955* (Univ. Dipl.-Arb. Vienna, 1998). Eiusdem, *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Osterreich 1945-1955 und ihre politische Mission* (Vienna et al.: Böhlau, 2005).

⁵ Kirill Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad. Soviet Music and Imperial Competition during early Cold War (1945-1958)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2015).

⁶ Cf. Jessica Gienow-Hecht’s path-breaking book: Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2009).

⁷ Alexander Golovlev, “Tchaikovsky Meets Debussy: French and Soviet Musical Diplomacy in Occupied Austria, 1945-1955”, PhD Diss. European University Institute Florence, 2017. Unfortunately, I will not be able to provide a satisfactory literature overview here, and I will rather explore problems that I could only cursorily, if at all, address in my previous work. See in particular pages 201-202 within the dissertation where this tour is shortly mentioned, and from where the exact lists of the critical reviews cited here in footnotes 12 and 13 originate.

What I would rather do is to zoom in on one particularly audacious episode of Austro-Soviet musical contacts: the 1950 “Weeks of Friendship.” This festival featured a large-scale tour of Soviet musicians who for the first time performed not only in Soviet-controlled Vienna, or even Graz, but also in Innsbruck and Bregenz, far outliers in Western Austria isolated from the Soviet sphere of influence by the US zone and themselves subordinate to France.

Those annual “weeks” and “months” were called into being both by Soviet authorities in the country and by the bilateral Austro-Soviet Society,⁸ set up initially as a non-partisan organisation in 1945 to facilitate cultural and economic links to the former “Russian” enemy. As the Society was regularly subsidised from Moscow, it also established connections with the All-Union Society for Cultural Exchange with Abroad (VOKS), which furthermore had a detached liaison officer in Vienna. Music, owing to its standing in Austria and the relative popularity compared to direct propaganda, quickly advanced to be one of the Society’s main areas of activity: the rejection of Soviet Communism went hand in hand with the reinforcing idea of the Russians as a “people of music”, to which the Soviets necessarily had to cater.

Moscow’s prestige diplomacy was increasingly beset with a number of cultural and political problems accompanying Soviet tours since 1948-1949. Firstly, the post-February 1948 anti-formalist campaigns sent shockwaves through the musical profession at home – even though the exported musicians were at safe distance from accusations of veering from the party line. That line, however, demanded explanation and justification before foreign audiences, and this was clearly one of the reasons why conformist composers, such as Anatoly Novikov who will be one of the main protagonists in this story, were given a prominent place in the brigade. Secondly, the rising Cold War tensions, owing to the Berlin crisis, the Czechoslovak coup and the Korean War abroad, as well as a stall in peace treaty negotiations for Austria, compromised the Soviet Union’s image in the country and caused severe political concerns both in Moscow and in Vienna. Thirdly, and quite intriguingly, the local Communist Party was entertaining projects of returning to political significance on the street (it had been ejected from the mainstream politics by the disastrous November 1945 election results, where it had received just 5% of national vote). Those projects featured launching a national strike in the fall of 1950, a project that did not receive direct support from the Soviet authorities who maintained an increasingly lukewarm relationship with their Austrian comrades,⁹ recognising the discrepancy of Soviet geopolitical interests and the inner-Austrian perspective of local communists. Keeping this cultural-political

⁸ Gesellschaft zur Pflege kultureller und wirtschaftlicher Beziehungen zur Sowjetunion, Österreichisch-Sowjetische Gesellschaft.

⁹ See: Peter Autengruber and Manfred Mugrauer, eds., *Oktoberstreik: die Realität hinter den Legenden über die Streikbewegung im Herbst 1950: Sanktionen gegen Streikende und ihre Rücknahme* (Vienna: ÖGB Verlag, 2017).

conundrum in mind, I will look at how the different layers of artistic exhibition and political goal-setting coexisted at the “brigade” level, and, in particular, if the contemporaneity of the Soviet tour and the Communist-led (ultimately failed) strike was a coincidence.

These problems will lead me to a further remark, this time concerning the sources. Here, silence is often no less important than functionaries’ words, and the very opacity of Soviet bureaucratic newspeak, while representing a genuine challenge for a researcher, is itself revealing of the workings and potential efficiency of the Stalinist cultural-bureaucratic apparatus. The following piece is based on internal reports discussed at a session of the VOKS’ Musical Section, and on the other hand on Austrian press’s (uneven) coverage of those events. I would wish to find voices that are more direct from the musicians or the audiences involved. Another important omission was that the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, which habitually observed the political climate in Vienna and the *Bundesländer*, and tended to be fairly suspicious towards the Soviets in the western zones, did not comment on the 1950 tour in Graz, Innsbruck and Bregenz. East-west contacts reveal both unexpected contact surfaces, such as Austrian Vorarlberg, and numerous difficulties with interpreting the sources, which are worth stressing while observing this rapidly developing field.

Towards the early 1950s, the Soviet administration in Austria and its superiors in Moscow had gathered considerable expertise in launching guest tours, from 1945 to larger-scale guest performances in 1948 and, particularly, 1949 (such as the vastly popular Georgian State Ensemble of Folk Song and Dance). Moscow clearly decided to step up the effort in Austria. The importance of the impending 1950 tour justified a Politburo decision, passed in early September,¹⁰ which left very little time for final preparations for a tour starting later in the same month. In September and October 1950, Soviet musicians and musicologists arrived in Vienna, duly heralded by voices from Communist press.¹¹

The mixed troupe did not represent a coherent ensemble and was not meant to perform together, or in the same room. It consisted of a duo of Ballet soloists (thus avoiding the expense of inviting a whole company), two pianists, a singer, a violinist, and a women’s quartet. Theorists-propagandists were represented by Anatoly Novikov and Ivan Martynov (Tikhon Khrennikov had made a short, little publicised visit earlier in summer), three composers who were building a successful career in the Stalinist cultural establishment. While Soviet authorities could not enlist another Ulanova, as in earlier tours, they made sure that younger soloists, mostly

¹⁰ O komandirovanii v Avstriiu delegatsii VOKS i gruppy sovetskikh artistov dlia uchastiia v mesiachnike avstriisko-sovetskoi družby. Politburo, 4 September 1950. RGANI, fond 3, opis’ 35, delo 38, list 36. Also RGASPI, fond 82, opis’ 2, delo 1119, list 35.

¹¹ “Die Österreichisch-Sowjetischen Freundschaftswochen,” *Volksstimme* 28 September 1950: 5.

recruited among the outstanding recent graduates of the Moscow Conservatory, and a high proportion of women would be noticeable to Austrians (the violinist Galina Barinova, the pianist Tamara Guseva and the harpist Ol'ga Erdeli advancing to musical figureheads of the Soviet delegation). Generally, the Russians were keen to choose prestigious locations, such as the Viennese Konzerthaus. Further locations included Sankt Pölten, Krems, and Wiener Neustadt in the Soviet zone, Graz in the British zone and Innsbruck and Bregenz in the French zone, a first Soviet tour in Western Austria.

The musical part of the tour appeared to go down relatively well with the Austrians. Assessing this success, however, calls for a few qualifications: one the one hand, it is difficult to express in quantitative terms, and on the other hand, the veracity of contemporary accounts will need to be looked into more closely. An eloquent silence can be clearly perceived from the sources: it was overwhelmingly the communist press that gave most extensive coverage (well over 90% of total: 20 in the Soviet-led *Österreichische Zeitung* and 11 in the Communist-dominated *Der Abend*, against single articles in *Neues Österreich* or the UK-led *Weltpresse*) for the Soviet tours. The majority of reviews in the *Österreichische Zeitung*¹² and the Communist-led *Der Abend*¹³ stood in sharp contrast with Soviet parlance and preferred to exalt the incoming musicians in artistic terms, using the language that would be perfectly sanctioned even by conservative newspapers. However, there were important differences revealing the editorial policies and, ultimately, the material base of each newspaper. Whereas the *Volksstimme*, the main organ of the Austrian Communist Party which did not feature an extended cultural column, would just send a

¹² "Große Freundschaftskundgebung im Konzerthaus," *Österreichische Zeitung* 26 September 1950: 5. "Sendboten einer schöpferischen Musikkultur : Zum heutigen Auftreten der sowjetischen Künstler im Konzerthaus," *ÖZ* 28 September 1950, 5. "Zwei Repräsentantinnen der sowjetischen Kunst," *ÖZ* 29 September 1950: 5. "Die sowjetische Künstlergrippe in Sankt Pölten," *Ibid.*: 5. "Das erste Wiener Konzert der sowjetischen Künstler," *ÖZ* 30 September 1950: 5. "Anatolij Nowikow - ein Komponist des Volkes und der Völkerfreundschaft," *ÖZ* 01 October 1950: 7. "Einfache Menschen begrüßen sowjetische Künstler," *ÖZ* 03 October 1950: 5. Iwan Martynow, "Meister des Sowjetballetts," *ÖZ*, 4 October 1950: 5. "Die sowjetischen Künstler in Wiener Neustadt," *ÖZ* 05 October 1950: 5. "Wir wissen, wo unsere Freunde sind: Begeisterung um die sowjetischen Künstler in Krems," *ÖZ* 06 October 1950: 5. "Iwan Martynow : So leben und schaffen junge Sowjetkünstler," *ÖZ* 08 October 1950: 5. "Edle Musik als Geschenk der Freundschaft : Gäste aus der Sowjetunion konzertierten im Sowjetischen Informationszentrum," *ÖZ* 10 October 1950: 5. Iwan Martynow, "Vier junge Talente : Das Frauenstreichquartett des Staatlichen Moskauer Konservatoriums," *ÖZ* 11 October 1950: 5. "Heute Auftreten der sowjetischen Künstler in Innsbruck und Bregenz," *ÖZ* 12 October 1950: 5. "Zwei Solistenabende der sowjetischen Künstler," *ibid.*, 5. Iwan Martynow, "Im Dienste der Kunst und des Friedens : Der Sänger J. Bjelow und der Pianist A. Dedjuchin," *ÖZ* 13 October 1950: 5. "Begeisterte Aufnahme der sowjetischen Künstler in Innsbruck und Bregenz," *ÖZ* 14 October 1950: 5. Hans Hajas, "Galina Barinowa, die hervorragende Geigerin," *ÖZ* 17 October 1950: 5. "Klavierabend Tamara Gussjewa," *ÖZ* 18 October 1950: 5.

¹³ "Russische und Österreichische Musik : Was die sowjetischen Künstler bei ihrem heutigen Konzert bringen," *Der Abend* 28 September 1950: 6. "Sowjetische Künstler traten gestern im Konzerthaus auf : Von Herzen, möge es zu Herzen gehen," *DA* 28 September 1950: 6. "Lieder vom neuen Leben: Autorenabend Anatolij Nowikow im Musikverein," *DA* 30 September 1950, 6. "Tamara Gusewa im Mozartsaal," *DA* 10 October 1950: 6. "Sowjetische Künstler Sonntag in der Scala," *DA* 12 October 1950: 6. "Abschlußkonzert der sowjetischen Künstler," *DA* 13 October 1950: 6. "Die sowjetische Geigerin Galina Barinowa," *ibid.*, 6. "Die Moskauer Pianistin Tamara Gussewa," *ibid.*, 6. "Galina Barinowa erzählt: Ich geigte in Peking," *DA* 14 October 1950: 6. "Eine Woche großer Opernpremierer und Konzerte," *DA* 16 October 1950: 6. Kurt Blaukopf, "Randbemerkungen zu Oper und Konzert," *DA* 17 October 1950: 6.

general report, the philo-communist, yet officially independent and culturally minded *Der Abend* gave predominant attention to purely artistic matters, shying back from striking an openly propagandistic line and, by doing so, downplaying the theoreticians' part.

*Galina Barinova, a violinist from Moscow, is much better than the programme she is playing, and much more than the propaganda (sic!) that was given for her concert in the Brahmssaal [at the Konzerthaus]. What an excellent technical prowess does she squander even for undignified trifles! An accomplished acrobatics of the left hand, an ideal conduct of the bow, a thought-through phrasing (this is how you play Schubert!) are the solid foundations of a superior performance, true to the works played [werktreu], which truly triumphs with Bach and plays a trump card in refinement [raffiniert autrumpft] in Glasunov. No wonder that there was no end to applause and encores.*¹⁴

To the contrary, the *Österreichische Zeitung*, edited by the Soviet military administration, fired political salvoes and quoted the theoreticians, most notably Ivan Martynov, quite extensively on its pages. The newspaper's editorial board, however, was fully aware of the credibility crisis which had beset the organ nearly since its inception in 1945, and it did allow for a series of musical reviews written in a more Austrified register, palatable to the public. The *Österreichische Zeitung*, like *Der Abend*, dedicated a laudatory article to another Barinova's performance at the Soviet Information Centre, singling out the "long ovations, the flowers, the glowing faces of all".¹⁵ No less important in the eyes of its editors, the apparent success of Soviet musicians in Innsbruck deserved an extended comment,¹⁶ comparable only to "first-hand" translated pieces expressing the politically convenient, and undoubtedly crosschecked, opinions of Galina Barinova and Ivan Martynov on the achievements of Soviet cultural policies. Here, the dividing line between what happened at the concerts and what the Soviet administration deliberately sought to convey, became increasingly blurred, which causes caution in assessing, if not cancels out entirely, its factual trustworthiness.

There is another analytical difficulty with press reporting, alluded to earlier. All these papers, given their limited range and circulation, could but hardly serve as efficient promotion tools, and the 1950 tour is in fact rather untypical in the nearly complete silence of the mainstream media where the Soviet Union had little leverage, while the US administration and its Austrian fellow-travelers set the tone. In Western Austria, where the (officially not party-affiliated) *Tiroler*

¹⁴ Kurt Blaukopf, "Galina Barinowa," *Der Abend* 17 October 1950: 6.

¹⁵ "Edle Musik als Geschenk der Freundschaft: Gäste aus der Sowjetunion konzertierten im Sowjetischen Informationszentrum," *Österreichische Zeitung* 10 October 1950: 5.

¹⁶ "Begeisterte Aufnahme der sowjetischen Künftler in Innsbruck und Bregenz," *ÖZ* 14 October 1950: 5.

Tageszeitung and *Vorarlberger Nachrichten* dominated local media landscapes, this could become a problem. Unlike the effusive *Österreichische Zeitung* in Vienna, the *Tiroler Tageszeitung* issued one rather polite, if genuinely positive report on the musicians on 14 October, followed by the *Neue Tageszeitung* on 17.¹⁷ Other, to our knowledge all of them Viennese, newspapers paid lip service to the Soviet artistic advances: as non-partisan *Neues Österreich* issued a short, although rather praising, notice,¹⁸ followed by the (British-led) *Weltpresse*.¹⁹ The *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift*, the leading organ of the Austrian musical profession, and thus reflecting the accepted view of the nation's mostly conservatively-minded cultural establishment, issued a very warm appraisal of Soviet musicians, which were held in very high esteem by Austrian commentators.²⁰ This veneer of prestige and performing excellence that was closely associated with the "Russians" had already advanced to a key trope in discursive reception of Soviet musical offerings. Their academic training, and a repertoire featuring classic and modern Russian, as well as non-Russian European (in no small part Austrian) works allowed for a professionalised cultural dialogue in the common idiom of European art music, and added significant symbolic capital to young Soviet performers who received accolades from their high-brow-minded, mostly senior colleagues in the "land of music."

Sadly, no direct musicians' accounts could be found to date, and it is down to composers – which I will refer to as "theorists" – that the task of reporting on their Austrian experiences was devolved in the Soviet apparatus. Anatoly Novikov conducted a number of meetings with Austrian musicians and (philo-) Communist organisations, including a rehearsal of his songs with a choir of the Free Austrian Youth, a Communist-dominated organisation. Consistently adhering to the party line, Novikov carefully constructed and presented the image of an exemplary Soviet composer, while being rejected by pro-western circles. Novikov later wrote a report on his Austrian experiences and gave a talk at the VOKS central office. He delivered a due philippic against Austrian "formalists" (wisely sparing the pro-Soviet, if independently-minded Marcel Rubin who had established a name in the professional community),²¹ and provided – coming fairly close, yet not directly alluding to the general strike – a picturesque description of a group of Austrian musicians begging in front of the still dilapidated building of the State Opera, apparently typical of "Marshallised" Austria.

¹⁷ Excerpts from local press were cut out and attached to Soviet reports in: GARF, fond 5283, opis' 16, delo 33, list(y) 1-18. Most of them cover Communist newspapers (notably the *Österreichische Zeitung*), reflecting the general trend in the density of press reactions.

¹⁸ "Sowjetische Gäste in Wien," *Neues Österreich* 29 September 1950: 4.

¹⁹ "Konzerte sowjetischer Künstler," *Weltpresse* 2 October 1950: 5.

²⁰ Peter Lafite, "Österreichische Chronik: Wien," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* Heft 10-11 (Oktober-November) 1950, 236.

²¹ Otchiot A.T. Novikova o poezdke 8-19 sentiabria 1950 goda v Avstriu (undated). GARF, fond 5283, opis' 16, delo 33, list(y) 75-77

*In Vienna, the opera theatre is still not reconstructed. You can see next to this smashed [razbitoe] building a group of begging musicians. Destitute Viennese musicians in front of a destroyed opera theatre is a symbolic picture of the today's Marshallised Austria.*²²

Here, he clearly referred to something the Soviets could see in the Austrian capital, yet at the same time provides an explanation marked by ideological clichés, which make it quite difficult to distinguish between the seen and the constructed. Thus, audiences expressed “an enormous interest in the life of the Soviet Union, and the struggle for peace led by it”.²³ Taken critically, Novikov’s is in fact a challenging testimony to directly infer any Austrian reactions, and serves no less as a source on Stalinist discursive practices than a genuine reflection on Austrian realities. For instance, Novikov asserted that

There were such questions: can we [i.e. the Soviets] criticise Stalin? Comrade [Alexander] Iakovlev gave a brilliant response to this question. He told what Stalin did for the people and then asked his question: Can you, after all this, criticise comrade Stalin? After these words, the room gave a literal ovation [bukval’no rukopleskal].

If not a pure invention (which is rather unlikely, given that Novikov spoke in presence of other testimonies), his words indicate a strong Communist Party members’ presence in the room, apparently provided via the Austro-Soviet society; this evidence is further corroborated by other referrals to public chanting the *Internationale* in Graz (a stronghold of the Communist Party in Austria), and “revolutionary songs” elsewhere.

Ivan Martynov, another leading member of the “theorists” group, gave a comparable account at another VOKS meeting held on 11 November 1950, almost two weeks after Novikov.²⁴ Despite following a standard, on-record format, his testimony stands out for its minute attention to Austrian realities, even if refracted through a Stalinist lens. Martynov was the only Soviet delegate who explicitly mentioned the *Oktobersstreik*; however, his account does not suggest prior knowledge of the strike action. Martynov gave a dramatic picture of a near complete transport blockage and, in his view, the brutal police repression which quelled the strike. He further noticed the reconstruction works at the Vienna State Opera, and paid particular attention

²² Protokol obshchego sobraniia chlenov Muzykal’noi sektsii VOKS, 30 October 1950. GARf fond 5283, opis’ 21, delo 119, list 7.

²³ *ibid.*, list 78-83

²⁴ Stenogramma obshchego sobraniia chlenov Muzykal’noi sektsii VOKS, 11 November 1950. GARf fond 5283, opis’ 21, delo 142, list(y) 2-12.

to the “virulent anticommunism” at the city’s conservatory, as well as at street musicians, supposedly resulting from a “70% unemployment rate” in the profession.

However, Martynov pointed to public affluence to concert rooms and theatres, and a relatively high symbolic status that artists enjoyed in Austria, which in part translated into interest for Soviet performing guests. This interest translated into attention given to the Soviets by the Western Allies’ administrations in Austria. The Americans simply refused the Soviet artists and composers the right to stop in their zone, but did not impede free passage to the Tyrol. In this context, Martynov pointed out that the British allowed a Soviet concert “in defiance of” the US (*v piku*), and he noticed a very warm welcome given by the French authorities in Innsbruck. Arriving in Bregenz later, the musicians and accompanying composers faced an interested public for whom a Soviet artist was a genuinely exotic show, but also some DP’s who “attempted to cause scandal.” Steering clear of unnecessary political complications while sticking to the party line in order to have a clear record at home proved to be one of the propagandists’ main, and expected, concerns, particularly on a little familiar terrain where no cultural action of note had been carried out by the Soviet Union.

In this vein, the cautious Martynov gave close attention to actual Soviet concerts; he specifically talked of public success in Innsbruck (where French officers were also present), Bregenz (with members of the Austro-Soviet Society, local public and visitors from neighbouring Switzerland) and Vienna. This notwithstanding, he critically assessed the logistics and advertisement preparations of the Soviet administration and the Austro-Soviet Society, stating that on one occasion the scene was effectively too small, and, in Vienna, posters for a promising Guseva-Barinova concert were put on display just a day and a half in advance (the performance was crowned by a remarkable success, with Guseva and Barinova giving 50 minutes of encores – echoing the press reports cited earlier). Cladding his analysis of public reactions in ideological terms, Martynov seconded his observations of genuine applause for the musicians themselves by a statement that “every time the name of Stalin was mentioned, the audience broke out in ovation.”²⁵ Provocative questions from the audience were not spared to the Soviet guests, even if they had a purportedly happy ending: when asked about Arnold Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique, Martynov confirmed his absolute rejection of it as “formalism”, apparently persuading his interlocutor.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid, list 11.

²⁶ Ibid, list 7.

These tropes of defence of the Soviet cultural policies, anti-American attacks – with repeated references to “Marshallisation”²⁷ – were followed by expressions of genuine interest to Austria and its people, particularly to Western Austria where a visiting person from the Soviet Union, unless a DP, was a rare sight. The vitriolic anti-Americanism (apparently stemming in part by the US refusal of concerts in their zone, which included the prestigious scenes of Salzburg and industrial regions of Upper Austria) was accompanied by a genuine interest in a country where so few Soviet citizens could set foot. While Soviet guests carefully described the clearly Communist reactions that followed the desired model of personal adoration for Stalin, their references to public applause do not appear fraudulent: they match the reporting patterns seen in local Communist newspapers and those, sadly not numerous, reviews appearing in Soviet-independent press. With the unprecedented geographic scale of this tour, Soviet-Austrian musical contacts reached a temporary climax, which was certainly not achieved in the following years until the end of Allied occupation in 1955. The classic repertoire and refined academic training of the Russians, far from pandering to direct Communist propaganda, was scheduled to appeal to “bourgeois” circles as well. In this case, attempts of political infiltration, such as short speeches at concerts and public appearances of the “theorists”, do not show any evidence to have a positive effect in the predominantly anti-communist Austria.

Were Soviet musicians meant to support the *Oktoberstreik*? The sources do not offer any positive indications in this regard, or at least the Soviet guests and their Austrian partners put on a remarkable display of ingenuity. As it is so often the case in analysing actual or presumed Soviet policies, those sources that are available in written form do not offer a clear vision, and their paucity and lacking transparency do not make for a convincing reading in one or another direction. It would not be counterintuitive to suppose a calculation on the part of the Austrian comrades, although again there is no evidence the Soviet visitors were warned in advance. For musicians, a strike action meant unpredictable difficulties in transport; and it is not inconceivable that the US authorities suspected the Russians of weaponising their tour to back the Communist offensive while banning them from performances in the American zone, yet not impeding their passage to staunchly conservative Western Austria. Again, these ambiguities stress the importance of a careful, and critical reading of Soviet and Soviet-affiliated sources, for which any research in this field has to account, as well as to the specificities and the problematic measurability of the “results” of cultural diplomacies in general. Courting controversy was

²⁷ A July report by Khrennikov, who had gone to Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia, equally revolved around the misery of musicians in “Marshallised” Austria compared to the people’s democracies (GARF, fond 5283, opis’ 21, delo 119, list 37).

hardly beneficial to Soviet musical prestige in Austria, yet Austrian reactions, and this contradiction in particular, reveal the different social and political anchoring, fields of action, and agendas of the Soviet and Austrian actors involved. While voices of performing musicians and the, presumably passive, listening public are very difficult to access, refractions of the Soviet tour in a limited variety of sources represent a challenge so familiar to many historians, tackling which will forever remain a burning issue of academic research.

As the Dave Brubeck ensemble, who toured the world as US “jazz ambassadors”, famously stated in 1962, “no commodity is quite so strange as this thing called cultural exchange.”²⁸ On the height of the Cold War, Soviet Union’s musical ambassadors carried a controversial message, which revealed a number of facets of which various audiences could partake. The Communist minority could affirm their public presence, the “conservatives” (including, at least culturally, the Socialists) would “just” listen to the music, and the artists themselves could gather experiences of performing on some of the world’s most prestigious stages. And they could - as Novikov and Martynov spelled out in their reports -, have a glimpse into a country where the Soviet Union still had a direct presence, but which was clearly set to become part of the Western world.

²⁸ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), 254. See: Reinhold Wagnleitner, “No Commodity Is Quite So Strange As This Thing Called Cultural Exchange: The Foreign Politics of American Pop Culture,” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 46/3 (2001): 443-470.